



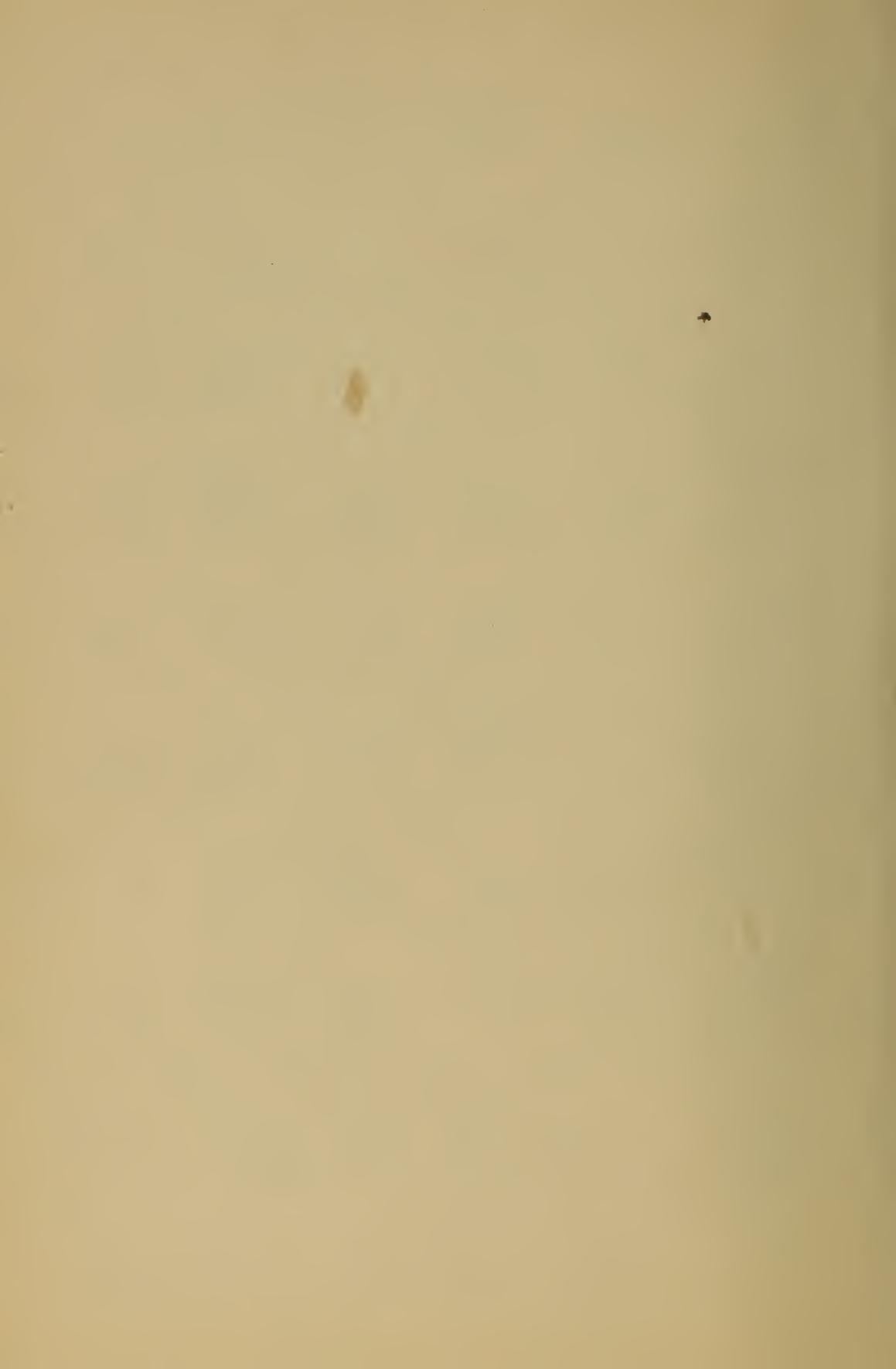
RUSTIC LIFE
IN
FRANCE
BY
ANDRÉ THEURET

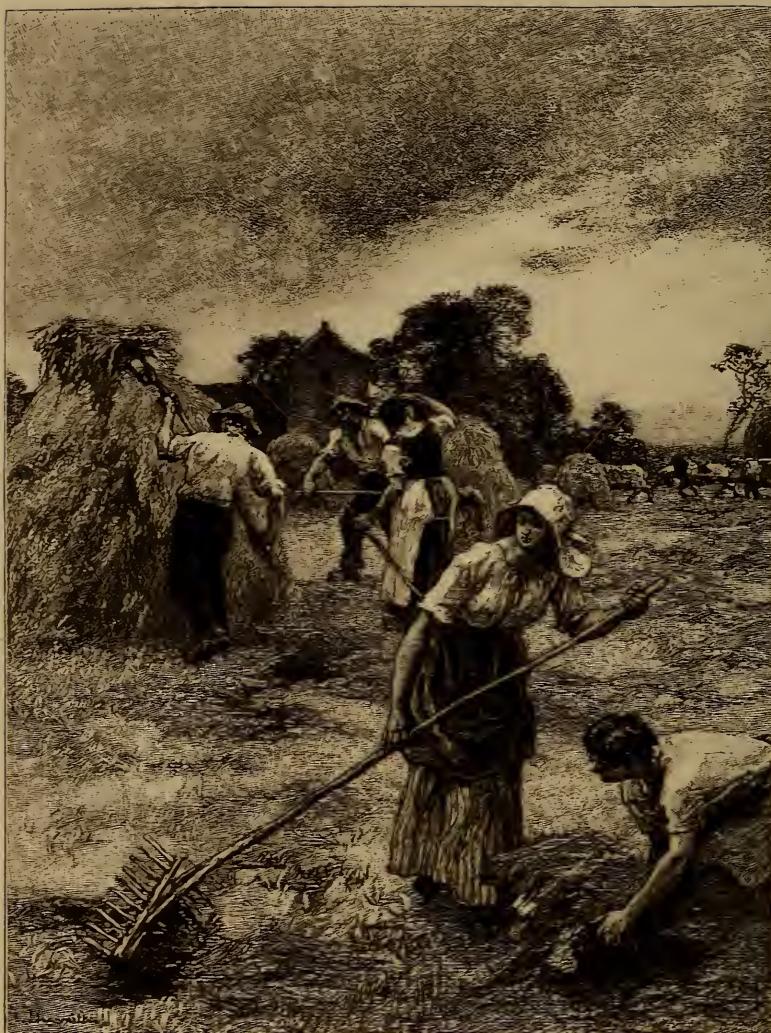


ILLUSTRATED BY LÉON LHERMITTE









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ANDRÉ THEURIET

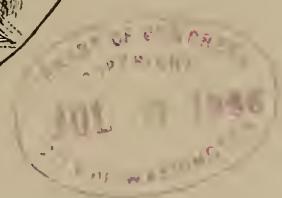
RUSTIC LIFE IN FRANCE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

HELEN B. DOLE

With Illustrations by Léon Lhermitte

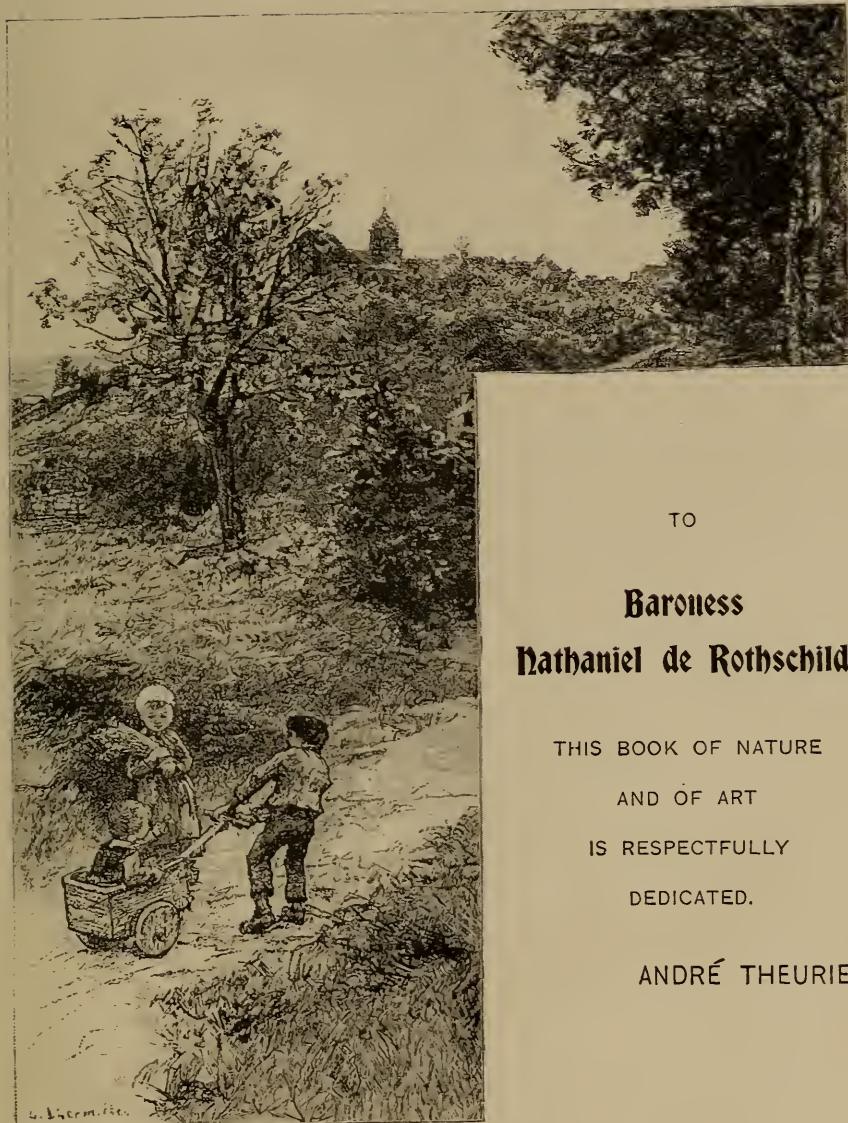


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1896

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TO

**Baroness
Nathaniel de Rothschild,**

THIS BOOK OF NATURE

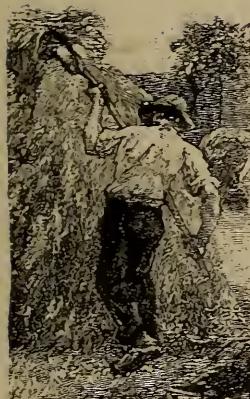
AND OF ART

IS RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED.

ANDRÉ THEURIET.

INTRODUCTION.



VERGIL said, “O too happy husbandmen, if they but knew their own blessings ! ” . . . And at the end of the second book of the *Georgics*, in fine, musical, vivid verses, he enumerates the joys of rustic life. But Vergil wrote under the inspiration of Mæcenas; and the minister of Augustus desired, it is claimed, by the aid of this official poem in honor of agriculture, to arouse among the Romans a taste for laboring in the fields. Another poem, the *Moretum*, attributed also to the singer of the *Georgics*, gives a more exact description, a more real picture, of the rude life of the Latin peasant.

The key-note of the *Moretum* is the truth. I have found it again among our own people, in a popular Breton song:—

“O husbandmen, you lead a hard life in the world. You are poor, and you make others rich; you are despised, and you must pay respect; you are persecuted, and you are submissive. You are cold, and you are hungry. O husbandmen, you suffer much in this life ! ”

And in the same vein, the poet Pierre Dupont, who knew and loved the peasant, exclaims in the “Song of the Wheat:”—

“Work on, work ever,
Oh peasant poor !
Let slothfulness never
Stop thy endeavor—
Or thy ruin’s sure.”

What has contributed to justify this idyllic legend of the peasant’s happy lot is the fact that rustic labor, on account of its scene of action, on account of its exterior manifestations, on account of its implements even, has been from all time a fertile source of inspiration to poets and artists. The principal operations of the workman in the fields have a grandeur and simplicity about them marvellously suggestive to a painter or a poet. Ploughing, sowing the seed, haymaking, the harvest, the vintage,—all these solemn or joyful scenes, by their action and picturesqueness, make

a lively impression on the imagination; and their poetry reflects upon the humble actors taking part in them, ennobling and transfiguring them.

But the peasant, considered apart, has always remained very indifferent to the picturesqueness and poetry of his laborious existence in the country. For a long time, it is true, he has been kept in his rustic surroundings by his instinctive love for the soil. But now this unconscious attraction is beginning to decrease. During the last quarter of a century the peasant has undergone a transformation, and is more and more inclined to leave the village and the fields, where once his whole life was passed. The earth no longer yields enough to make him forget the annoyances and troubles of his hard profession. Foreign competition has lowered the price of wheat; the *phylloxera* and mildew have spoiled his vines; the railroads, by bringing him within reach of the cities, have given him an appetite for pleasures and the necessity of comfort which he never knew before. If he himself remains attached to the soil, he swears that his children shall not cultivate it. His daughters go away to the large cities, and his sons shut themselves up in schools in order to become

clerks or tradesmen. The villages are becoming depopulated; in certain thoroughly agricultural sections there are no farmers to be found, and whole territories remain neglected.

On a parallel with this distaste for the soil, manifested by the peasant, our closing century shows an abnormal development of scientific and industrial life. Before long, industrial enterprise will take hold of the fields, meadows, and woods, where farming on a small scale is dying out. Large syndicates will be formed, as in America, to cultivate vast tracts of land by rapid and economical processes. They will clear away the forests, which a deputy the other day publicly called unproductive wealth. The manufactory will replace the farm. Machines will do away with the use of those elementary and picturesque implements which contributed to the poetry of rustic labor; the steam-plough will be substituted for the old-time *arau*, as the threshing-machine has been substituted for flails and fans. Mechanical reapers and mowers will take away from individual labor the characteristic spontaneity, the unconventionality, the free and easy gait, constituting its plastic beauty. The woods will give place to fields of

beets ; they will not even spare the trees scattered through the fields, nor the green growing hedges forming arbors above the sunken roads.

Everything not of direct utility will disappear. The country, furrowed by rectilinear roads, tramways, gravelled ways, will have the appearance of a great chess-board under methodical cultivation, where everything will be by rule, mechanical and specialized, like a gigantic manufactory.

Then there will be an end of rustic life ; its charm and picturesqueness will be found only in the books of poets and artists' drawings.

And do not believe that this is a gloomy and fancifully exaggerated picture. You have but to look around you to prove the distaste for labor in the fields, and the invasion of industrial enterprise. Remember the intimate and restful character, the state of nature, which the suburbs of Paris still presented thirty years ago, and see them to-day, diminished, vulgarized, infected by manufactories. Study, on a forestry map, the vast area of our woods, and you will see it shrink from year to year like Balzac's *peau de chagrin*. Consult statistics, and you will learn the gradual depopulation of the country districts. These are prognostications ;

and, in a time when things change with electrical rapidity, you can easily calculate, after the changes already brought about, in how many years the peasant whom our ancestors and we ourselves have known will have disappeared almost entirely.

Venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus.

It is related that, in the last days of polytheism, some people, who were sailing on the sea in Greece, heard at night a mysterious voice cry, “Great Pan is dead ! ”

When at nightfall I take a walk through the country, and in the growing obscurity I see the chimneys of manufactories all ablaze, when I feel the ground tremble under the wheels of locomotives rushing red and panting into the darkness, — it seems to me also that a deep sigh comes forth from the earth, and a melancholy voice whispers around me, “It is all over with rustic life ! ”

I have often talked over these things with Léon Lhermitte, the man of all our living painters who is most familiar with the peasant, and knows how to depict him most truthfully.

All who are interested in the art of painting admire the painter of “Paying the Reapers,” “Wine,”

and "Haymaking;" the author of these robust, delightful sketches picturing day by day the rustic epic of the toilers in the fields. Lhermitte lives a large part of the year at Mont-Saint-Père, one of those picturesque villages extending along the banks of the Marne, between Dormans and Château-Thierry; one of those corners of French territory which contain, in a small space, a large variety of husbandry and rural landscapes. There the meadows spread out, following the capricious windings of the river; vines cover the slopes with verdure; the wheat waves beside fields of sainfoin and lucern; and great woods extend to the tops of the hills. There can be studied every phase of peasant life, indoors and out, and the artist has known how to profit by all these opportunities of observation, whether scenes of interiors, or labor in the open air. In his work, which has already grown so important, he has reproduced, with sincerity, conscientiousness, and remarkable vigor, the action and poetry of the peasants. One may say, without fear of being accused of exaggeration, that Lhermitte is a master painter of rustic customs.

Very often, in our conversations, we have together noted the transformation, or rather, the

degeneration, of country life; and for a long time have been planning to bring out together a collective work, having for its object the study of the labor and the private life of the country people.

We wish to show the peasant as we have both known him,—Lhermitte, on his banks of the Marne; I, in my plains of the Meuse,—and to paint him with absolute sincerity, avoiding the sentimentality of the writers of idyls, as well as the brutal and false methods of the school called *naturalistic*. We propose to depict the great acts of the rustic drama, seed-time, ploughing, haymaking, the harvest, and the vintage; to tell of the isolation of the farm, the busier life of the village, the pleasures of Sunday, and the tasks of the week; finally, to follow the peasant through all stages of his laborious existence, at school, in the fields, in his household, during the short intoxication of youth, and the long, troubled days of riper years; from the osier cradle, rocked by his mother, to the pine coffin where he rests in death.

For a long time we have been prevented or interrupted by other occupations, and also by the difficulty of finding a publisher who would understand our plan, would take an interest in it, and help us

with his experience. We have at last met such an enlightened and devoted collaborator. A publisher, whose beautiful books of art are the joy and admiration of bibliophiles, has lent us his aid; and this is how the book, so many times proposed, is now ready to appear before the public.

We have tried religiously to collect the relics of the customs, the faces, and landscapes which are likely to disappear; and we shall be abundantly rewarded for our efforts if we have thus been able to preserve to posterity the picture of a world and a nature which they may never know.

October 15, 1887.



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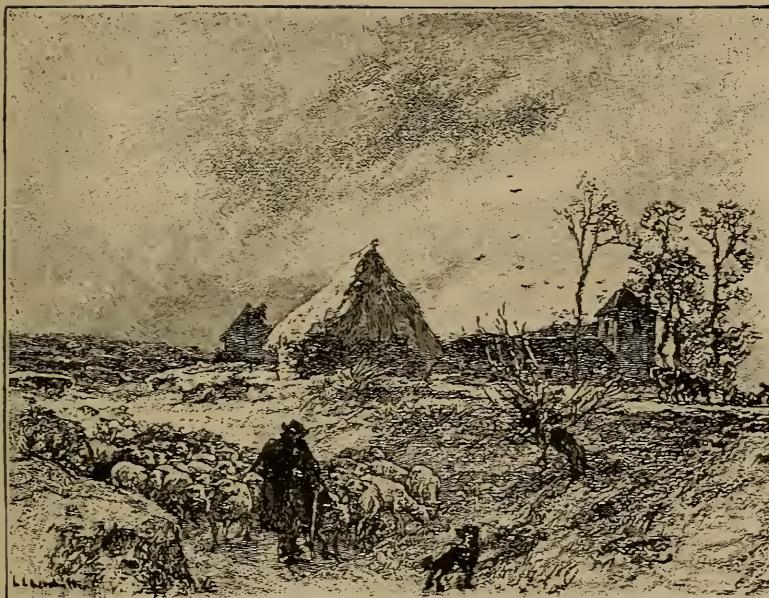
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THE FARM.

LOST mid the bare and swelling prairie,
Where fogs sweep down from wintry skies,
The farm apart and solitary
Like an island in the ocean lies.

A slender thread of smoke ascending
Scarce marks it to the wanderer's eye,
As, down the well-worn foot-path wending,
He quits the forest black and high.

When dusk has fallen, a faint glow only,
 Touching with red the tiny panes,
Reveals it to the shepherd lonely,
 As with his flock he roams the plains.

And while the ground with snow is hidden,
 'Tis wrapt in slumber still and deep,
Till the mild suns of March have bidden
 New life within its heart to leap !

The larks once more are heard; men now share
 The joy their coming gives the sky;
And through the sod the polished ploughshare
 Draws furrows where the seed may lie.

And soon the seed will swell — upspringing !
 April, amid her tears and smiles,
Her tapestry of green is flinging
 To carpet countless miles on miles: —

Sainfoin and oats trembling all over,
 And young rye shivering as with cold;
And peony-hued tufts of sweet clover,
 And patches of colza ruddy as gold !

Then come the dog-days fiery-gaited,
 And at the dusk of eventide

The sultry summer breeze is freighted
With scent of ripeness far and wide.

And now is heard the din of thrashing,
The air throbs with the clacking drum ;
And o'er the flinty highway clashing,
The heavy-laden wagons come.

And like a hive when bees are clustering
Beneath the fiercest midday sun,
The farm sends out its workers, mustering
Both men and cattle — sparing none !





I.

FARM LIFE.

USUALLY at a distance from the village, isolated among the fields, or lost in the depths of the woods, the farm represents familiar, solitary, rustic life.



Its situation, removed from country hamlets, gives it the silent, mysterious character which a village shepherd preserves among

the other peasants. Separated from the rest of the world by a vast extent of plains or forests, it is concentrated in itself; the old customs, the language, and habits of bygone days are better preserved there, not having to come in immediate contact with the civilization of the towns. On

certain farms, carried on from time immemorial by the same family, it is not unusual to find the antique furniture which generations of farmers have handed down faithfully from one to another; the same bed, in the shape of a clothes-press, out of the way in an alcove, has seen the death of the grandfather and the birth of the father; the same osier or walnut cradle has rocked all the children. Except on fair and market days, when the folk go to the town; except Sunday when they go in a company to the distant parish church,—the rest of the time they live by themselves, and have no social intercourse other than with the animals and the plants.

The only tie which unites the farm to the civilized world is the postman, seen from time to time appearing at the end of the road, with his blue blouse and red collar, and his bag full of letters. But letters are rare, there is little leisure for reading the papers; and if the postman stops at the farm, it is oftenest to tell the news while he empties a glass of beer, cider, or sour wine. While yonder in the large cities they are desperately busy with politics, on the farm the sounds of war or revolutions only come hushed, transformed,

vague with the air of fabulous legends. The fall of a minister, or the death of a celebrated man, causes scarcely more emotion than the falling of an apple on the grass in the orchard, or a flight of pigeons from the dove-cote.

If there is little communication with the outside world, as a compensation life on the farm itself is noisy, active, bustling. The farmer's wife rises at the earliest dawn, while the men, according to the season, go out to attend to the work in the fields; and, before even taking her own breakfast, she prepares the food for all the animals, for the farm is as populous as a Noah's ark.

The horses, having been cared for by the men, are already starting out for teaming, ploughing, or harrowing; now the rest of the creatures arouse in the barns or around the buildings. The cows low from their stalls; the cocks crow in the henhouse; on the other side of the orchard, on the hillside, the bees hum around the hives; while, on the conical roof of the pigeon-house, the doves coo as they wheel about.

Under the shepherd's guidance the sheep have started away in the gray morning mist to wander through the pasture-lands. They are the least

domestic guests on the farm, passing the entire day outside, and sometimes, in fine weather, sleeping under the stars in the open fields, in the movable enclosures in the park, near the shepherd's nomad house. Strictly speaking, the farmer and his wife pay little attention to them until shearing-time. At this season, generally in summer, wool-merchants visit the farm, examine the flock, and bargain with the proprietors. Then, before the shearing, the shepherds take the sheep to the edge of the nearest stream, and there proceed to wash the bleating flock, which in spite of their struggles are plunged into the clear water. The sheep, penned in on the bank, are dragged one after another into the midst of the stream; the men in charge of the washing scrub them with all their might, and let them come out white as snow, all ready to let their woolly fleeces fall beneath the shearers' noisy shears.

Let us enter the farmhouse. In the great cool kitchen,—with its tiled floor, where the clock ticks in its long case, the dressers display their colored crockery, and the wooden shelves their rows of glittering copper vessels,—the kneading-trough, the cupboard, the heavy walnut table, have been rubbed

till they shine; a fine fire burns on the andirons beneath a copious kettleful of potatoes destined to feed the young pigs, already grunting from the pigsty.

Although the pig is neither the most beautiful nor the most amiable of the creatures on the farm, he is assuredly the one most petted and best cared for; not on account of his grace or good nature, not out of friendship, but, simply and prosaically, because he is easy to keep and very profitable. The farmer's wife calls him "my darling," the farmer never speaks to him otherwise than as "my good fellow;" one would suppose that, even in talking about him, they try to invent polite periphrases, to notice the importance they attach to his person. In conversation he is only designated by the name of "silky-skin."¹

When the sow litters, she is more coddled than a woman in confinement, and the farmer's wife brings her porringers of milk. As they grow larger, the young pigs are treated with every sort of attention. They are fed, indulged, and even amused, without stint. In the autumn they are taken to the thick woods. There they breathe in the fresh, fragrant air; they fill their bellies with

¹ *Habilé de soie.*

acorns and beech-nuts, after they have sharpened their appetites by chewing fern-roots. In stormy weather they go back to their shelter, filling the warm atmosphere of the stable with their keen odor. There they find a good supper and a good bed; they do not leave it except to go to wallow voluptuously in the fresh mud in the yard. They are served with generous messes of potatoes, beet-roots, and bran, accompanied by copious bumpers of skimmed milk. Sometimes liberality is carried so far as to offer them a bill of fare of cooked vegetables, grain, and flour. So they are fat and flourishing, their pink flesh standing out in pretty cushions, their eyes almost disappearing under the rolls of fat. From time to time they receive visitors in the stable: idlers stroll in one after another, go into ecstasies over their appearance and their fatness, guess how heavily the jolly fellows will weigh, and heap praises on the "silky-skins," who respond, without disturbing themselves, by little wigglings of their corkscrew tails and by deep grunts of satisfaction.

The pigs having been fed, it is the cows' turn next. Slowly, majestically, they come out through the dark door of the barn, where they have fin-

ished their daily allowance, and take their way towards the stone trough, which a servant, hanging on the handle of the pump, has just filled with fresh water. The broad daylight falls generously on their glossy coats, fawn-colored or brown, coffee-colored or black-and-white. Between their sharp-pointed horns you see protruding their red muzzles with steaming nostrils. Their great iris-colored eyes look as innocent as a child's; their foreheads laboriously meditative, are stamped with an almost august serenity. They plunge their muzzles alternately in the stone trough, filled to the very edge, then draw them out and raise them voluptuously, while the cool water drips down their dewlaps in slender threads, sparkling in the sun. And the farmer's wife, standing in the middle of the yard, admires their brawny sides and swollen bags, exhaling a slight odor of milk. As she looks at them, she has a sort of vision of pails into which the foaming milk is falling, of pans full of thick cream, standing in rows on the shelves of the dairy, white cheeses still moist in the mould, and pats of butter wrapped in vine-leaves, which will be changed at the market into clear-ringing silver.

But the glory and pride of the farmer's wife is, above all, the poultry-yard. All the poultry are now outside; and the housewife, having filled her apron with grain, scatters liberal handfuls of barley and wheat to the whole fluttering, clucking, cackling flock. In the middle, the cocks, standing on their spurs, their crests in battle array, their necks erect, their tails like sickles, wait like gallant knights till the ladies have eaten, and limit themselves to surveying the hens on the right hand and on the left, as they run, trotting and pushing, to pick up the grain. All varieties of the race of hens are represented there,—cochin-chinas, with their long legs, and only a slender tuft of feathers in the shape of a tail; feather-legged hens, looking as if they walked with trousers covering their claws; crested hens, shaking their variegated crests in a droll way; hens from Houdan or Bentham with solemn gait; pullets speckled with black and white, resembling chess-boards. Each one pounces on the grain with little airs of eagerness, nodding her head, and clucking sharply.

The pigeons from the top of the dove-cote look down at the spectacle of feasting; then, unable longer to resist the temptation, start in simulta-



THE FARMYARD.

neous flight, describe a semicircle in the air, and in their turn scatter about in the yard, where they try their luck, caring naught for the pecking of the vicious hens.

Leaving the branches of a walnut-tree where they were perching, the guinea-fowls also come down to take part in the feast. They stretch out their beaks solemnly, and flutter their short tails. Two turkeys, with red necks adorned with fleshy excrescences, strut clumsily among these smart, lively, winged creatures, and walk to and fro with a stupidly important air; while on a low wall, a peacock, lifting up his slender head surmounted by an aigrette like a diadem, and making a magnificent display of his tail, decorated with eyes, turns slowly around, wheeling about and uttering a raucous, reiterated cry, heard for half a league.

All these creatures make a lively picture of shifting color in the sunshine; the red crests, the lustrous green tails, the fawn-colored, the black-and-white plumage, speckled or spotted, assume in the broad light a strong, metallic splendor. In this changing of lively, variegated colors, there is really a feast for the eyes, a dazzling delight.

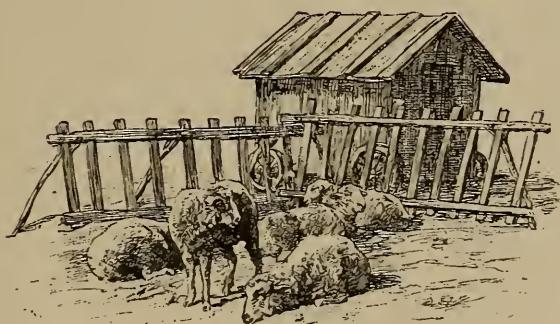
In the clear freshness of the morning, a burst

of sound spreads over the farm. Cock-a-doodle-doo like trumpet blasts, cooing of pigeons, quacking of ducks, mooing of cows, neighing of colts,—all this is detached in quick, lively notes, above the humming bass formed by the dull rumbling of a threshing-machine in the barn. The traveller, at a distance on the plain, hearing this awakening clamor, is cheered by it. There is something hospitable in this noise on the farm, interrupted now and then by the barking of dogs. It gives to the city people passing through the country dreams of pastoral life. M. Prud'homme himself is touched in his heart, and is seized by a desire for coarse bread-and-milk food.

Gradually, as the sun ascends in the sky and the morning advances, this noise dies away. The farmer's wife goes back into her shady kitchen, busies herself with household tasks, skims the pans, oversees the servants, and prepares the soup for her family.

Noon. A great silence falls with the increased brightness over the quieted farm and the almost deserted farmyard. The workmen in the fields, stretched out on their backs, with their hats over their eyes, are taking a nap at the foot of the

hedge ; in the house, those who are left are quietly dining. The distant ringing of the *angelus* comes across the sun-bathed fields. Nothing is heard but the subdued sounds of the animals chewing their cuds in the barn, the drowsy hum of the bees around the hives, and from the holes in the dove-cote, the sweet, lulling coo of the loving pigeons. Even the ducks paddle about silently in the pond, and the dogs stretched out in the shade, with their noses on their paws, watch with half-closed eyes over the apparent sleep on the farm.





II.

HAYMAKING.



"HE who says meadow says hay, and whoever says hay says everything." This is an old peasant axiom which is perfectly true, for without meadows there would be no good horses, no stout cattle, and consequently no prosperous agriculture. Another saying claims that meadows will outlast several generations without any need of cultivation; but this is false. A meadow, to be in good condition, requires as much care and labor as other agricultural property. It must be drained, irrigated, dressed, and cleared. "The grass in the meadows," says P. Joigneaux, "does not live on the

wind any more than the grass in the fields. If you nourish it ill, it will grow ill; if you nourish it well, it will repay you largely for your trouble."

So the owner of a natural prairie can no more fold his arms than the owner of a field of wheat. He must dig drains and dispose them ingeniously, dress his meadow each year, renew the grass from time to time by sowing carefully mixed seed; he must also fight against the natural enemies of the meadow, rushes and moss, the two intruders. But how well he will be paid for his work, when, in July, the thoroughly healthy meadow, well aerated and watered, gives him grass in great abundance!

What more delightful sight is there than a meadow in bloom the last of June! Bordered on one side by the mirror-like river, with its banks covered with willows and poplars; on another side framed in the abundant verdure of hedges of hawthorn, privet, and hazel,—the grass, tall, thick, and juicy, gently waves its surface of changing tints. All the plants fit for fodder—labiate, vegetable, grassy—mingle their forms and tints to give infinite variation to the soft carpet changing in the sunshine. Each little blade of grass sounds its note in this symphony of colors: there the

sage waves its blue sprigs; the *caille-lait* and the daisies spread out in places the soft, milky whiteness of their flowers and their aigrettes; the thistles and the pink clover make purple spots here and there; while the cumin, the lucern, the sweet clover, and the lion's foot display farther along patches of pale yellow. Amongst this dense blossoming, the numerous grasses lift their thousands of slender stems and their sea-green heads of bloom. The quaking grass moves its trembling spikelets like tiny bells; the fescue-grass and the grass called *féole* shake their violet panicles; the ears of the long-bearded melic-grass bend at the least breath of wind; the fragrant anthoxanthum and the wild oats rock their metallic-colored scaly calyxes. And through the aerial quivering of these slender stems, these husks and silvery balls, appear the little blue flowers of the veronica, the tiny hoods of the bugle, the dishevelled globules of the pimpernel.

Sometimes the meadow looks all yellow, with here and there the bright red of a poppy which has strayed into this sea of grass; sometimes it is reddish brown; sometimes it has the colors of a changeable green and lilac fabric. In the morn-

ing hours, after the dew has disappeared, it smokes like a censer. The pollen, escaping from all these grasses, held suspended in the damp air, hovers in a fine fragrant steam above the ripe herbage. But, as the sun rises, this fertile dust is scattered; and, in the dazzling radiancy of noonday, the meadows, saturated with light, are filled with the low hum of insects—lulling music, a harmonious accompaniment to the burning air and the blazing sun.

To the rhythmical sounds of this buzzing chant come a flight of butterflies, like a *corps de ballet*, dancing on the tips of the blossoming stalks, swarms of little blue butterflies, sulphur-colored pierides, yellow *machaons* striped with black, large and small sacred butterflies with fawn-colored wings, silvery underneath. Until evening comes the plants in the festal meadow are intoxicated with sunshine, and the dancing butterflies gorge themselves with perfume.

But the grass is ripe, and here come the mowers. In the early morning, in the dew, they begin to work. The bright steel glitters in the rising sun. At each semicircle described by the scythe as it cuts the stalks with a full and regular swishing,

the mown grass falls at the laborers' feet. In a twinkling the golden tone of the meadow is modified. In places where the grass is already cut the ground is of a tender green; the scattered piles at intervals make dark spots in it. As the scythe shears the meadow, a penetrating aromatic breath is exhaled from the mown hay. It seems as if the grass required the violent treatment of haying-time to bring out all its perfume.

Is not this peculiarity of cut grass also characteristic of human emotions? We do not really appreciate our blessings until they are already buried in the past; memory must embalm them in order to have them give out all their perfume. We never fully enjoy the present; we rarely say, "How happy we are!" But we are always repeating, "How happy we might have been!" Regret for past joys which have not been completely relished give them an exquisite perfume.

From time to time the mower stops to whet his scythe, which fails to cut; he dips his whetstone into the wooden horn, full of water, hanging from his belt; and from the meadow rises into the sonorous air the clashing of whetting or resharpening steel. The labor advances with the morning; the

sun-burned faces grow moist with sweat; arms and backs begin to grow weary. Noon strikes from a distant bell-tower; and by the path along the river the women from the farmhouse appear, carrying in wrought-iron porringer the luncheon for the mowers,—a small loaf of home-made bread and fresh cheese. Then the work is interrupted; the men lean their tired backs against the trunk of some willow, and slowly, methodically, chew large mouthfuls of food, while the big-bellied bottle of blue stoneware, filled with sour wine, is passed from hand to hand, and each one, with head thrown back, his eyes turned heavenwards, drinks without putting it to his lips. The meal ended, they have a little talk with the women as they gather up the empty porringers, then, weariness overcoming the pleasure of conversation, the men stretch themselves out at full length on the meadow, flat on their backs on the fragrant mown hay, their straw hats drawn over their eyes, and sleep soundly during the burning hours of the middle of the day.

The meadow having been once mown, the work of haymaking begins. This is more agreeable, and not as hard; so it is willingly left to the women.

The skirts and waists of the haymakers wielding the rake stand out in the light on the despoiled meadows, which have taken on delicate tones of silvery gray. In my part of the country all the women wear a sort of bonnet covered with light cambric, called thereabouts a *bagnolet*. This light, floating headgear protects the back of the neck, and projects over the forehead like a penthouse, similar to a Quaker bonnet, leaving the girls' faces in a mysterious shadow, accentuating their blue eyes, and making them more brilliant.

They begin to make stacks; at the foot of one sits a peasant woman, with outstretched legs, resting with a child on her knees, while farther on an old man, bareheaded, and in his shirt-sleeves, turns over the hay with youthful vivacity. A woman, leaning on her pitchfork, stops for a moment to watch the swallows flying to and fro, black against the flowing green water of the river. At a distance, in the open air, the details are simplified, the lines become sculptural, and the pose of the laborers grouped around the haystacks have a grandeur reminding one of Millet, the master painter of rustic life.

Oh, these haystacks arranged in quincunxes on

the meadow, what a magic odor they send across the serenity of summer evenings, and how this odor recalls the pleasantest evenings of all my early youth! At twilight I used to come with my college friends and stretch myself out on the meadows of the Ornain, at the foot of the heaps of freshly piled hay.

We were scarcely seventeen years old, and full of the imperturbable confidence in the future, the presumptuous hope, inherent in all young people; we dreamed of nothing less than winning glory, and with glory the hearts of all women.

Proudly pouring forth our school-boy verses and our effusions in a full voice towards heaven, we found no adventures impossible enough for our audacity, and every evening we set out in imagination for the conquest of some fabulous Golden Fleece.

While we were declaiming our verses, while we were building our castles in Spain, the summer night, magnificently starred, was falling lovingly over hillsides covered with vines.

The river flowed with a gentle murmur, and, in places where the poplar-trees cast a shadow, reflected the rays of the stars.

Crickets in hundreds gave forth their spasmodic trill among the short stems of the shorn grass.

Sometimes we would unfasten a boat, and let ourselves slowly drift along past the meadows, which succeeded one another for a good league.

The black poplars and willows, intertwining above our heads, formed a thicker and thicker obscurity; we could see only the twinkling of a star now and then.

Among the leafy arbors, shivering with a cool sound, the evening dew fell like a fine rain; from time to time, peeping between the trembling leaves, the blue-tinged rays of the new moon would reach us.

Intoxicated with mystery, enthusiastic over the beauty of the night, we would declaim again and again the poetry of our invention: —

The bending willows lightly shiver,
The moonbeams glitter on the river,
 Its wan ripples grow silvery bright.
Our little skiff goes softly gliding
Mid dark green leaves where, coyly hiding,
 Gleam lilies white.

The dew-pearled branches o'er us glisten,
And when the oars stop and we listen,
 Mysterious sounds we hear —

Like heavenly voices faintly calling.
The dewdrops on the water falling
Melt tear by tear !

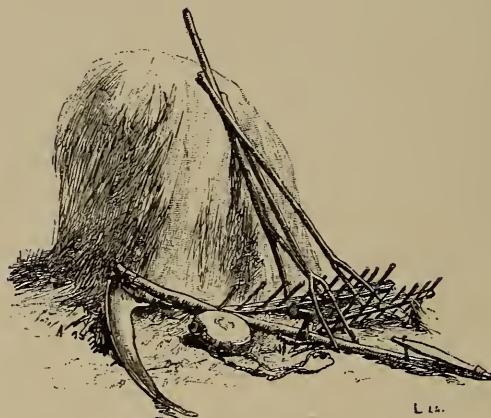
O friends, the gentle Night bends o'er you !
Be gay: yet do not let the echoes hear you;
O do not let your laughter rouse
The grim Realities which slumber,
Forgetful of you, in the sombre
Shade of yon boughs !

And sing! — Beneath the sky so mocking,
With eyes half-shut, I float on — rocking
In sweet dreams on the river's breast,
As if I were a happy baby
Whose mother cradles him if maybe
To perfect rest.

Alas ! Of all these songs of youth and all these friends of my seventeenth year, nothing is left but memories, scattered and fragrant memories, like the perfume of these haystacks, the collected sheafs of which the haymakers, pitchforks in hand, are lifting in the air.

The hay is dry. The long carts with spacious flaring sides are already stationed in the meadow. One of them, drawn by two brown horses, is half full of the heaps of sweet blossoming grass, which the driver skilfully levels above the edges. When the load is sufficiently high and evenly

balanced, the men and women mount to the top and stretch themselves out comfortably on the hay, which smells of sweet marjoram and mint. The whip cracks, the horses pull vigorously, the wheels sink in the elastic soil, leaving behind them, like a wake, two tracks of a greener hue; finally, amid the cracking of the whip and the shouts of the driver, the team clears the grassy slope and comes out on the white road. In the calm of the evening, while on the top the boys, lying near the women, are dreaming or chatting lovingly, the great wagon-load rolls towards the farm, spreading all about a healthful, aromatic odor.





III.

GATHERING POTATOES.



THE last harvest of the year and the least fatiguing. In the first days of October the great heat is over, but the days are still warm. After the white mists of morning are scattered, the sun tints with a warm orange color the edges of the woods, where the red and yellow leaves begin to scatter on the ground. In the pastures where the cows wander slowly, mushrooms spring up in a circle, making the silky whiteness of their tops shine among the grass. The sky is of a soft blue, the air sonorous with music. From afar is heard

the cracking of whips and the call of the thrush. On the meadows, all violet with colchicum, the long cobwebs, called “Virgin’s threads,”¹ unroll their white skeins. All this forms a calm ensemble, harmoniously blended, warmly colored,—a suitable setting for this patriarchal harvest; and for this reason all the people of the farm assemble as at a festival—all, even to the children, who are set down on a sheet at one end of the field to play with the acorns fallen from the neighboring oaks.

The potato-field no longer shows the beautiful, sombre, abundant verdure which covered it in summer; the herbaceous stems no longer lift towards the sky their villous branches, heavy with sinuated, pulpy leaves, nor their corymbs of white or lilac flowers with hearts of yellow stamens. Now the dead leaves, branches withered and half dried up, lying on the bare ground, scatter their bunches of greenish balls; this is the sign by which the maturity of the tubers is recognized.

The men in shirt-sleeves, the women in pink

¹ These peculiar cobwebs, *fils de la Vierge*, are white and silky, and are seen floating in the air when it is a little foggy in spring and autumn. Children are often told that they are threads dropped by the Holy Virgin while sewing, and that they bring good luck to those on whom they light. Hence the name.—TRANS.



GATHERING POTATOES.

or violet-colored cotton waists, pull up the stalks, and dig cautiously in the place left by each plant. A healthful odor from the disturbed earth is exhaled into the cool air; and the potatoes, still moist, roll into the furrows. All the varieties of this precious tuber are displayed in the sun.

There is the *large white*, spotted with red, called in some countries cow potatoes; it is the most vigorous, the most abundant, the most common, it prospers in all soils, and is cultivated extensively for cattle; the *long white*, excellent and very productive, known also under the name of *white Irish*; the *yellow round*, sweet, mealy, and very delicate; the *long red*, very spreading, kidney-shaped, of a firm consistency, but a little acrid; the *round or oblong red*, very rich in flour; the *violet Dutch*, the surface of which is marked with violet and yellowish dots; the *small white Chinese*, small tubers, irregularly rounded, of an agreeable, sweet taste; the *red and white*, with an exquisite flavor.

All these varieties contain nutritive principles differing only in their proportions. The white variety is generally earlier and more abundant; the red is less watery, more savory, and keeps better;

the yellow is finer-grained, sweeter, more delicate — they are preferred for the table.

It is a pleasure to see these potatoes, round or elongated in shape, of an appetizing color, come out of the ground. They lie in heaps on the freshly disturbed brown soil; the women fill osier baskets with them, and carry them to a brown linen sack, which one of them holds up, while the other pours the potatoes slowly into it. Soon, along the field, these full sacks stand at regular intervals, white, bunchy, and plump. Then the children light great fires with the dry tops and twigs gathered on the edge of the woods.

These fires blazing in the open air on autumn afternoons are one of the most enjoyable pleasures of childhood. They awaken the pleasantest recollections of my school vacations! We strove to see who would make the finest fire. We would begin by digging a hole in the ground, at the bottom of which we would place flat two stones to serve as fire-dogs, then we would run to the woods to provide ourselves with fuel,—fagots of black thorn, twigs of laburnum, dead and mossy branches, all were worth gathering. At first the fire was lighted with difficulty. The green wood

would twist with spurts of smoke, and would not blaze; then, by the help of dry leaves and by blowing, we would succeed in getting a bright flame, which would rise, terminating in beautiful blue puffs of smoke. Then we would devise all sorts of culinary preparations, of which potatoes roasted under the ashes formed the principal and the most important part.

I had a friend who shared all my gastronomical illusions, and was never backward when it was proposed to try some new experience. We had both read the *Swiss Family Robinson*; and we had seen the description of a certain peccary roast prepared in an underground oven, heated by means of a great wood fire. This wild and original dish made our mouths water, and for a whole week we thought of nothing but of inventing some means for making one similar. One Thursday, after school, we agreed to meet beside a potato field near the woods and a pasture. We had brought a piece of pork, with lard, pepper, and salt for seasoning, and we solemnly discussed the question of cooking it.

“Wait a moment,” said my friend L——, who had a scientific mind; “we must first construct the right kind of an oven.”

We made a hole in the ground in the pasture. We lined the bottom and sides of the excavation with flat stones, on which, with armfuls of dried branches, we made a fine, blazing fire.

While the flames were leaping up in the lonely pasture I began my *rôle* as cook. I laid the piece of pork in a bed of freshly gathered wild thyme, larded it, then wrapped it in vine-leaves, and went to dig some potatoes in the neighboring field.

“The oven is heated to the right point!” cried L—— to me.

We then laid our fillet on the heated stones, arranged the potatoes around it, and covered the whole with a roof of very hot pebbles, interspersed with gravel, upon which I made a new fire with the burning coals. Then, while the blue smoke curled up towards the sky, we waited, with beating hearts.

After an hour L—— said, “I believe it is cooked! Don’t you notice how good the roast smells?”

In reality we smelt nothing but an indistinct odor of burning herbs; but in imagination we smelt a savory aromatic perfume.

We disinterred our roast with a thousand pre-

cautions, smacking our lips in anticipation. Oh, deception! The roast *à la caraïbe* was absolutely raw! We were obliged to reject it, and content ourselves with the potatoes cooked under the ashes.

This happened long ago! After that L—— became a learned geometrician; he entered the Institute, then one day, broken down by overwork, he fell mortally ill. By the advice of his physicians, who thought that his native air might possibly restore him, he returned home, and found enough strength remaining to enable him to walk in the fields where we had so often strolled about during the years we were in college. One afternoon, the last of July, he was anxious, in memory of old times, to have a slice of ham cooked for him over a brushwood fire in the open pasture. He was sure that this would restore his appetite. A few days after, towards September, he took to his bed, and the rest of his life was gently breathed away, like the blue smoke from the fires of dry branches which the potato gatherers light in their fields.

These fires of the potato tops and dead leaves last all the afternoon. All this while the harvest is coming to an end; the sacks filled by the women stand in a line beside the road; the men

lift them on the wagon ; the little ones are tucked in among the sacks close against the sides ; and then, away !

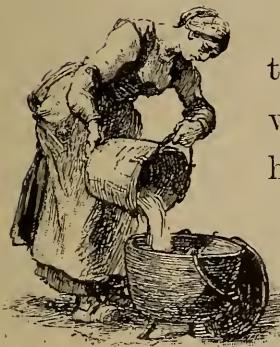
By stony, jolting roads they reach the farmhouse, the windows of which are already glowing in the last rays of the setting sun. And below, in the fields where the earth has been upturned, now grown solitary, the half-consumed fires still emit occasional sparks, and their slender threads of smoke mount silently in bluish lines towards the first stars.





IV.

SUNDAY ON THE FARM.



SATURDAY evening in the country, when the declining sun marks with a ruddy shaft its flight behind the clouds gathered in the west, and the coming twilight bathes everything in a semi-obscurity, those who are working in the soil straighten their

bent backs, wipe their foreheads, and, with a sigh of relief as they think that the next day is Sunday, take their way slowly to the farmhouse. Robert Burns, the rustic poet of Scotland, has written on

this subject of Saturday night some verses which always come to my mind when I walk across the country at the sweet twilight hour which marks the completion of the week's labors: —

November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh ;
The short'ning winter-day is near a close ;
The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh ;
The black'ning trains o' crows to their repose :
The toil-worn cotter frae his labor goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an agèd tree ;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise an' glee.
His wee bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty wifie's smile,
The lisping infant Prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
An' makes him quite forget his labor an' his toil.

To-day this picture of peasant life is still true in the most of its details. There is something peaceful and solemn about this return from the fields at the end of the week. Along the roads converging towards the farmhouse heavy foot-

steps resound over the pebbles, mingling with the jolting of wagons and tramping of horses' hoofs. Crossing the pastures, the flock, led by the shepherd, hastens back to the barn, which they greet with prolonged bleating. A little girl, with bare feet in her wooden shoes, a stick in her hand, drives a flock of geese towards the poultry-yard. A deep silence falls over the deserted country, where the silhouette of some plough stands out alone, motionless against the darkening sky. Silent in its belt of stunted willows and bending rushes, the sleeping pond still reflects the last gleam of the sunset, while the low windows of the farmhouse are lighted up with the dancing flames from the blazing hearth.

The creatures resting in the barn make no more sound, except an indistinct murmur, in the midst of which is occasionally heard the vicious grunting of a pig (*habillé de soie*) whose place some troublesome companion is trying to usurp.

In the kitchen, the men, stretched out on the benches, with aching backs and weary limbs, are waiting, hardly speaking a word, for the supper which the women are preparing. At last the brown earthenware porringers are ranged on

the long massive table, and the housewife pours out the steaming soup into them. Each one eats with measured slowness; then, having swallowed the last mouthful, hastens to his bed—the servants in the loft near the barn, the family in the spacious alcove opening from the back of the kitchen, and partly screened by curtains and a canopy of red cotton. The whole farm is soon wrapped in deep slumber; nothing is heard but the tick-tock of the clock in its long case, keeping time with the deep breathing of the sleepers. Sometimes the silence is disturbed by a cow rubbing heavily against the crib and pulling at her chain, or by the dry cracking of a bone by a semi-domesticated cat in a corner of the kitchen.

At dawn the distant ringing of bells announces through the fields the solemnity of Sunday. The farm awaken without haste, considering with inward satisfaction that it is the day of rest. In the yard, by the pump, the men, with bare necks and arms, proceed to their Sunday ablutions. The farmer takes his place before the little mirror, hanging by one of the kitchen windows, makes the soap foam in his crockery shaving-cup, and, his cheeks white with lather, shaves himself care-

fully. Then he puts on a clean shirt of coarse linen, his holiday waistcoat and jacket, and takes a bite of breakfast, all the while gazing at the yard and the farm-buildings. In the meantime, the women in the spare room are putting on their new skirts and jackets, pinning their woollen shawls with the minutest precautions over their shoulders, and the starched muslin head-dresses on their heads; and, taking their prayer-books from the cupboard, they go together to attend high mass in the nearest village.

The men also turn their steps toward the parish church, but usually with less pious intentions. The farmer takes advantage of this day to attend to his money affairs. He visits the notary, and sometimes, alas! the bailiff also. When he leaves the office where he has laboriously discussed his interests, his throat is dry; the tavern is but a few steps away, and through the windows he hears the clinking of the glasses and the loud laughter of the drinkers; then it is very doubtful if he resists the temptation to empty a bottle with the friends of the *White Horse* or the *Golden Sun*. When it is good weather, the customers meet outside in the yard of the inn, around a game of

bowls or skittles, while the tables stand under the cherry-trees. In unpleasant weather, the drinkers crowd into a smoky hall, and until evening, the blouses and jackets jostle on the wooden benches ; the glasses clink, thick white porcelain cups are filled with black coffee, and games of cards are introduced.

All the afternoon, and very often long after dark, in the heavy atmosphere of the hall, overheated with so many alcoholic breaths, through a fog of pipe-smoke, loud laughter is heard and snatches of conversation, recalling the rich talk of Rabelais's drinkers.

When wine alone is taken to quench the recurring thirst of all these dry throats, it is only half bad. The intoxication of wine is usually more noisy than harmful ; but as the public houses in the village multiply, the peasants get more and more in the habit of drinking beer and brandy. Coffee, which was only allowed formerly on high festival days, is used now on all occasions and in the smallest hamlets. It is only a pretext for numerous *glorias* and *pousse-cafés*, where they drain bumpers of German spirits, which are a hundred times more dangerous than vitriol. After these

drinking bouts, prolonged till nightfall, the farmer returns home with light pockets and clouded brain. Talking aloud, walking from side to side along the road full of ruts, he sometimes strays out of his way, gets into the mud in the marshes, where phosphorescent lights are dancing, which he takes for *sotrets* or *hannequets*. Or else the pocket of his blouse is caught on a thorny bush or the branch of a tree; he has great difficulty to extricate himself from this diabolical embrace, and the next day tells every one who will listen that he has had trouble with the “wolf-leader,” or that he has met the wild huntsman and been villainously kicked by the bewitched horses.

The women, after attending mass, return to the farm by the longest way, retailing the news they have collected under the church porch. Then, entering the silent home, where even the animals seem to understand and enjoy the rest of Sunday, they busy themselves with quiet, easy tasks. If the day is fine, they turn up their petticoats, put on a blue apron over their dresses, and go out to walk about leisurely in the garden or the orchard. They look to see if the fruit is beginning to set, if the cabbages are coming to a head,

if there are any caterpillars on their hundred-leaved rose-bushes. They exchange, and hold long discussions over, household receipts or superstitious customs: You must not spin on Saint Agatha's Day, or you run the risk of having foolish children. When the lilies bloom late, it is a sign that the vintage will be poor. When you sow turnip-seed, you must repeat this formula: "To Saint Barnabas I sow these turnips; let them be as tall as my leg, as large as my thigh, and as round as my head; by this means you will be sure of a fine harvest."

The rest of the day is spent quietly in innocent gossip.

But these are the old women's amusements. The young servants, for whom Sunday is a day of liberty, for the most part remain in the village, where they chat with their friends. In groups of three or four, they roam about near the dancing-hall, where the jerky scraping of a violin accompanied by a cornet is heard. Soon, elbowed by the boys, they enter the ballroom, after considerable pretended resistance. In spite of the precaution taken to sprinkle the floor between the dances, a cloud of dust floats around the revolv-

ing couples. The girls, in linen bonnets, a handkerchief tied around the waist, flutter about with modest mien and slyly downcast eyes; the boys, with their caps over one ear, their new blouses opening back over their waistcoats, have a more knowing look and bolder manner. After each figure, they lift their partners around the waist, and put them down again with a shout of glee.

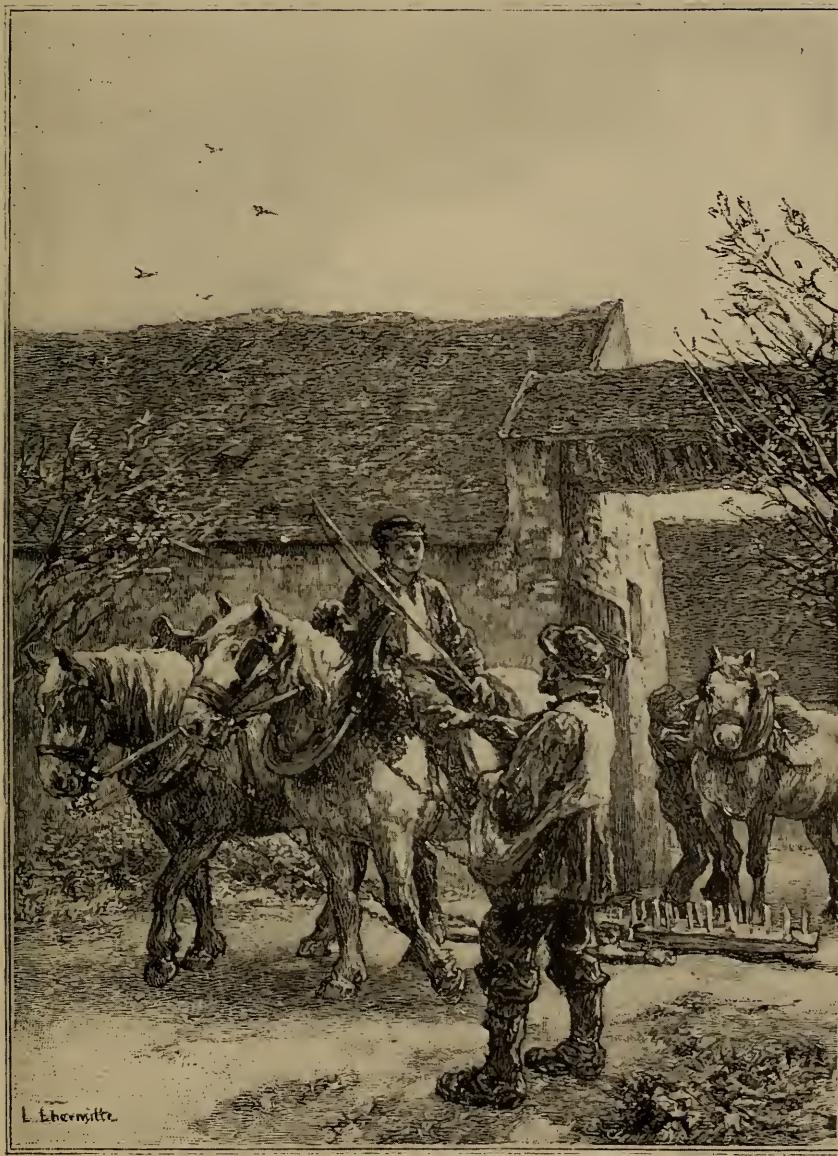
By the alluring rhythm, the noisy gayety, and the whirl of the dance, the demon of pleasure makes the maid-servant forget the rough work of the week. Quadrilles succeed waltzes, and to the tones of the violin the hours quickly fly away like humming bees returning to their hive. At nightfall the dancer obtains permission to accompany his partner to the farm, and the couples walk slowly along the dark paths under the indulgent stars. The roofs of the farmhouses at last rise in confusion on the plain. They part regretfully. The maid, still giddy, glides stealthily to the loft, where her bed stands on a level with the stable, and, although weary, she turns over and over for a long time without being able to sleep, the leaping sound of the violin still ringing in her ears.

The cocks crow. A white ray of light comes in

through the granary window. This is the dawn of day. With the horn lantern in his hand, the shepherd opens the stable door, and pushes before him the sheep, which scamper away, bleating long and loud. The pigs begin to grunt in their pen, and the stable-boy comes with lazy steps to give the horses their oats. Arise! The work of the week begins again.

In the gray light of the dawning day, the men are already bustling in the yard. In a piercing voice the farmer's wife calls and scolds the lazy maids, who shake themselves and stretch on their hard beds. The farmer, with dull head and tongue still thick from the drinking of the previous day, gives his orders in a surly way. They harness the horses to the ploughs, they fill the carts with dung, the day-laborers start off with their utensils over their shoulders; and, with a heavy step, in the chill of the early morning, ploughmen, harrowers, wagoners, still biting a crust of home-made bread, scatter along the roads, or across the fields.

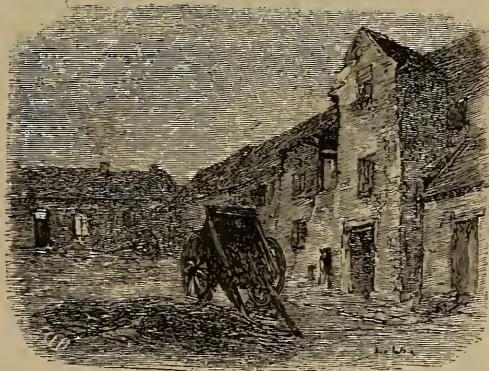
Whips crack, oaths are flung at the lazy animals, the wheels creak and joggle over the stones in the ruts. Each one goes to his work, and thinks

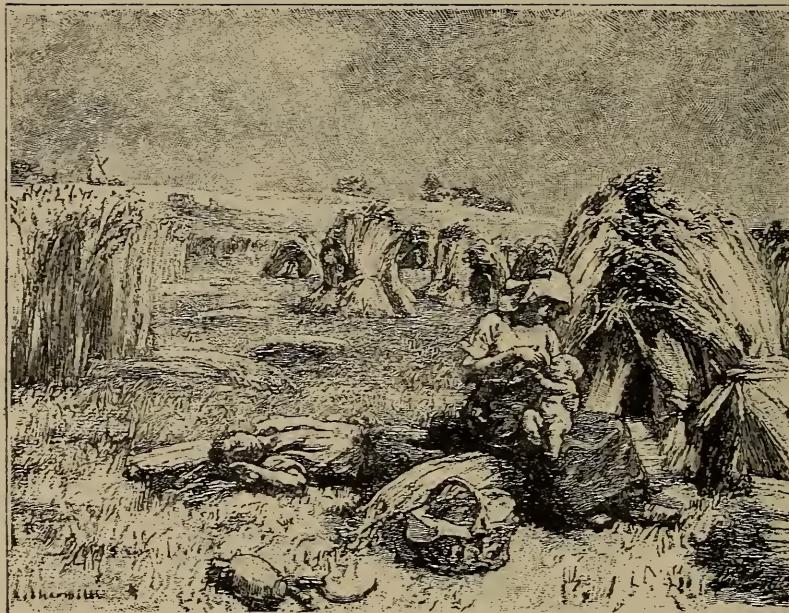


DEPARTURE FOR THE FIELDS.

sadly of the toilsome day when he must battle with the earth till evening.

Already, on the slopes of the fallow ground, in the dewy grass in the pasture, the shepherd is blowing his horn, and driving before him a tumultuous flock. His tall figure, with his coat wrapped about him, stands out against the bright horizon where the sun is emerging from a mass of rosy clouds.





THE GRAIN.

THE seed that was obscurely buried
Begins to thrill beneath the serried
Lines of the field.
But mother earth will fondly cherish
The frail germs lest they untimely perish
In her heart concealed.

The sprouts begin to green discreetly,
But by the snow 'tis kept completely
Protected from frost.

When April the blanket white has melted,
The tall stalks are already belted
With young ears flossed

In May what growth ! the wind caressing
With balmy breath bestows his blessing
On the young plant's head.

Swaying in graceful rhythmic measure,
It mingles the corn-flower's heavenly azure
And the poppy's red.

But the sun grows sultry ; the harvest is ready ;
The reaping-hook with progress steady
Cuts across the plain.
The stalks are stacked ; in the barn the flail falls ;
Then under the winnower's hand like hail falls
The clean, heavy grain !

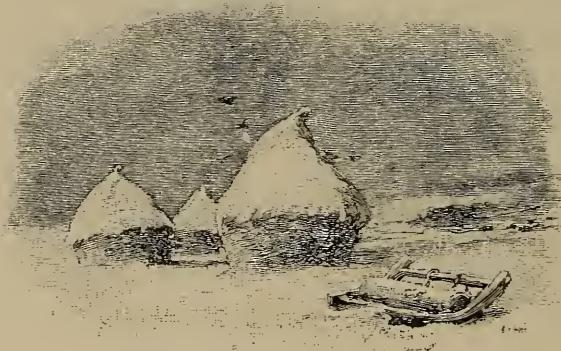
Ye mills, whose life is the breath of heaven,
Ye mills, with wheels by the torrent driven,
Grind from morn till night !
Grind away ! may the flower of the flour
Through the bolters fall in a ceaseless shower,
Pure, fine, snowy white !

And now, with reverent hands and willing,
The smooth and hollow bread-trough filling,

The dough let us knead !

And sing the kind wheat's genial glory,
Which man, since ages dim and hoary,

It has fed on its seed !

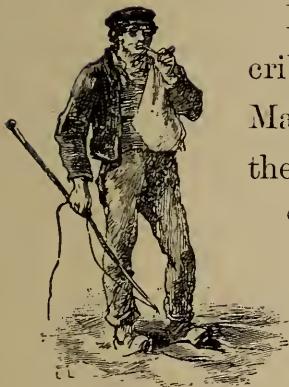




V.

PLOUGHING.

I FIND this in my notes, and I transcribe faithfully my impressions on a March afternoon in the fields where they were ploughing: —



“The whole village is in the fields. Up on the top of the hill, where they are sowing the spring grain, there is an animation contrasting with the solitude of the forest, the borders of which, in some places sloping, in some places projecting, frame with their sombre margins the freshly turned sods. Everywhere people and animals are at work; rustic life is wide

awake. Here they are already harrowing ; farther on the ploughshare is beginning to lift the shining clods. The horses pull with outstretched necks, the whips crack, the men urge them on with their voices, — Hue ! dia ! ohé ! Their shouts sound clearly through the sonorous air.

“The sun is not out this afternoon. A sky marbled with white clouds exposes through narrow rifts, here and there, patches of cold azure. A north wind bends down the dry grass in the stubble ; but, in spite of the stern aspect of the landscape, one already feels that the spring is only waiting for a warm rain to burst into life. Hundreds of larks are soaring towards the clouds ; and their vibrating, joyous, untiring songs mingle with the shouts of the laborers. On the brow of a hill in a field, just where the undulating line of the crest cuts the pale sky, a plough, drawn by two horses, and the man pushing it, stand out strongly against the horizon. The group is of striking harmony and grandeur. Nothing but the bare, brown earth, the clear sky, the simplified figures of the team and the ploughman ; and this composes a picture of such poetry and beauty as to command the attention.

“The man is young and robust ; he is twenty-five



PLoughing.

years old or more, his legs in coarse linen gaiters, his blouse of a brown color hardly distinguishable from the earth when he is in the lower part of the field; but when he slowly reaches the line of the horizon, his profile stands out against the sky, and the postman with his red collar, coming along the cross-road half-way up the hill, with his box on his back, shouts from afar a jovial good-day, waving his stick of cornel wood. The ploughman turns his busy face towards the postman, returns his greeting, and then goes on guiding his plough, urging along the horses." . . .

Although these notes give especially the impression of ploughing in the springtime, nevertheless, in a certain number of details, they are just as correct with regard to ploughing in the autumn. It is the same work, rough and absorbing; the atmospheric conditions and the tone of the landscape alone have changed. The fogs and the falling leaves of October give a more melancholy majesty to the initial work of ploughing. There is a touching contrast between the dying vegetation and the furrows opened to sow the grain for the next harvest.

With the exception of the spring sowing, the wheat is principally sown in the autumn. It is the

great season for ploughing, and it is the time when the peasant expends the greatest amount of labor. Ploughing is hard work, and requires not only patience and strength, but also long experience. In the first place, it demands strong arms, then an almost intuitive knowledge of the soil. Finally good ploughing depends, not only on the perfect condition of the plough and the intelligence of the ploughman, but also on the animals that compose the team.

“The ploughman who understands his business ploughs more or less deeply according to the quality of the soil and the season of the year. The earth having need of several treatments, the first ploughings must dig up the earth deeper down; the last, which precedes the sowing, must, so to speak, peel the soil rather than dig it up.”¹ Moreover, the wide, flat furrows are suitable for dry soil where it is necessary that the water should not flow too fast; in clayey, cold soil, on the contrary, it is better to make the furrows narrower, to give a slope to the fields, in order to facilitate the drainage. This explains why in certain districts the ploughed fields present a surface like an ass’s back, while in others the surface of the field remains level.

¹ P. Joigneaux: *Fields and Meadows*.

In our country, in the East, horses are used as draught animals; but in many parts, especially in the Western districts, ploughing is done with oxen. The latter have the advantage of always drawing together, of going slowly, and consequently allowing the plough to turn up the soil more equally. From a purely artistic point of view, the oxen have something more picturesque and majestic about them. Their calm, slow gait is more in harmony with the grandeur of this important work of ploughing.

Curving their powerful necks beneath the yoke, the oxen advance abreast, and pull vigorously, bracing their crooked legs against the soil. In the damp air their nostrils exhale a warm breath, vaporizing into white steam. Near them, the driver, regulating his step with theirs, touches their horned foreheads lightly with the end of his goad, and this brief caress is sufficient to make them walk straight. Bending over the plough, the handle of which he holds in his earth-stained hands, the ploughman raises or lowers the share. Behind, the upturned soil shows its brown sides with shining sods, from which emanates a good smell of mould. Sometimes a small boy, coming and going from the cattle to the plough, crushes the too compact sods with his

foot and crumbles them. This forms a group both simple and grand, combining all the roughness, and also all the poetry, of peasant life.

Sometimes the driver sings to urge on his oxen. In Poitou the term for this is *arauder*, and the songs vary according to the kind of ploughing.

Here is one for the principal ploughing of the year, in which the names of ten oxen appear:—

“Levréa, Noblet, Rouet,
Herondet, Tournay, Cadet,
Gageâ, Marlecheâ,
Tartaret! Doret!
Eh! Eh! Eh! my darling!
Oh! Oh! Oh! my valet!”

The song of the *araudage*, like most country songs in other places, is sung to a drawling, melancholy tune. The notes rise, are prolonged, and lose themselves in the distance, bearing away to the edge of the leafless woods the melody which harmonizes with the autumn fog, and the eddies of yellow leaves chased by the autumn wind.

The peasant is like a bird: he sings, not from gayety of heart, but from habit, and as if to make him forget his weariness. And ploughing is long, rough, tiresome work! When the season for plough-

ing comes, no matter what the weather is, he rises before dawn. He puts on his heavy shoes, still wet with the rain of the previous day; he harnesses his horses, better fed than himself, and puts them to; and in the uncertain light of a gray October or March morning, he goes through the drizzling rain, the sleet, or the wind, to the fields. And all day long, sweating under the labor, he has to plough up the stony or muddy soil; he has to be soaked to the skin if a shower comes up, burnt on the back if the sun shines too strong. Without stopping, without rest, he must plough, because the earth will not wait. The field must be ready for sowing, and for sowing one does not select a day. The ploughman returns home at nightfall, bent over, worn out, *hodé* as we say in our district, so exhausted with fatigue that he doesn't even feel any appetite; and between the weariness of one day and that of the next, the night is hardly long enough to relax his stiffened joints.

And so it is throughout the whole year. Each season as it comes brings its exhausting labor, till the day when, crippled and old, the peasant lies down in his bed; while his children look at him like a useless fly, and unconsciously think that it would

be a great relief to everybody if the good man should pass from life to death.

Ah ! the Brescian song about the people who till the land is sadly true : —

“ The poor tiller of earth
Is full of woes !
From the day of his birth
Begin his sorrows.

In rain and hail and thunder,
Whate'er the weather yields,
You'll see the hapless farmer
Forever in the fields.

The poor tiller of earth
Has children enow ;
At the age of fifteen
They are put to the plough.

He must furnish them gaiters,
He cannot refuse ;
For else will the soil
Sift into their shoes ! ”

And the pitiless song thus goes on through each stage of the farmer's existence, without letting you see, in this condition of human life, the least little corner of blue sky. The old Breton peasant song is less despairing, because, after mourning the fate of those who raise the wheat, it adds : —

"O husbandmen, you suffer much in this life ! O husbandmen, you are very happy ! . . . For God has said that the barn-door of his paradise will be open for those who have wept on the earth.

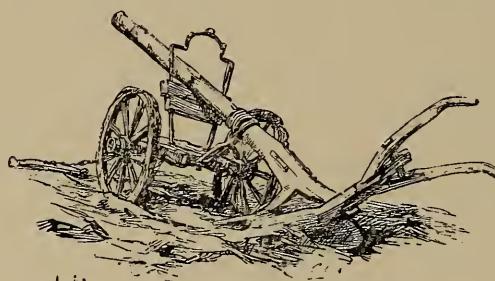
"When you reach heaven, the saints will recognize you, by your wounds, as brothers. The saints will say to you : Brother, there is no pleasure in living : brother, life is sad, and you are fortunate to be dead. And they will receive you into glory and into joy."

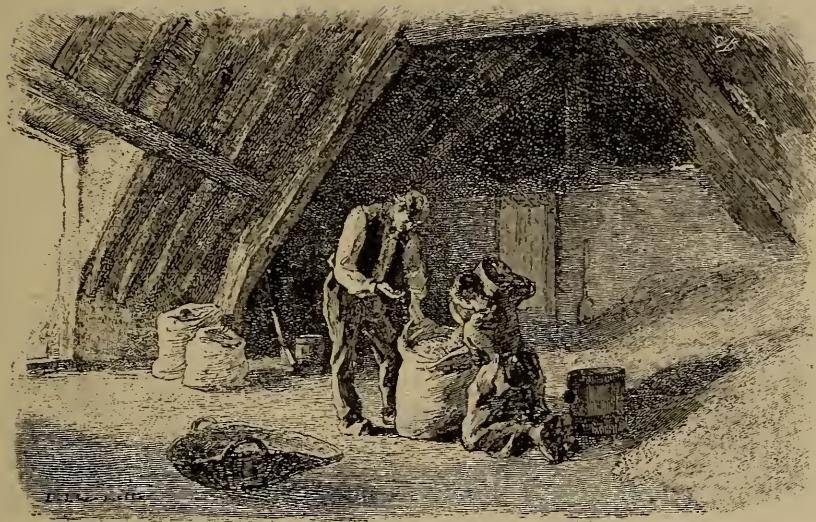
But the Breton song dates from a religious century, while the modern peasant has no belief, neither does he pray ; thinking, without doubt, that his voice is too feeble, and that God is too far away. He only lifts his eyes to heaven to see whether the clouds are threatening, and whether he will not be wet to the bones the coming day while he is guiding his plough.

If the peasant is no longer believing, he has at least the religion of resignation. Contrary to the workman in towns, he neither grumbles nor blames ; his complaint is neither bitter nor noisy. It seems as if this constant communion of man with the earth gives even to his grief something healthy, robust, and patient. The peasant has a horror of rhetoric. This is very noticeable in his songs, which are usually sad, but always simple and sober. In these two popular songs, Brescian and Breton,

which I have just quoted, and which are so opposite in tone and thought, there is still a common sentiment. Sweet resignation to a fatally unfortunate destiny, the Brescian song says.

The Breton complaint runs: "Life is sad, and you are fortunate to be dead." Neither of them questions any further, nor utters the least murmur of revolt. This resignation of man bending over the soil dates far back. It is found in the "Harvesters" of Theocritus, in Virgil's "Moretum." It is engraved on the wan and gravely melancholy faces of the peasants silently emptying their glass, in Lenain's beautiful picture in the Lacaze Museum. Everywhere, and in all ages, the husbandman seems to be sadly ruminating with an air of conviction the hard words of Scripture: "Thou shalt earn thy bread in the sweat of thy face."





V.I.

SEED-TIME.



THE grain of wheat is like the grain of mustard-seed in the New Testament: “It is a very small seed in the earth;” and yet among the most thrifty vegetables, among the loftiest trees, is there a plant which plays so important a part in the nourishment of the human race as the humble, delicate grain coming from this little seed? Wheat nourishes the largest part of the population of the earth. Oats, says a country proverb, makes the horse,

and wheat makes the man. Balzac went even farther. He claimed that wheat produced mind, or at least the most brilliant and lucid qualities of the mind. He proved that the people among whom bread forms a large part of their diet are the most intellectual people.

The grain of wheat is shaped like a minute loaf of bread; it is golden brown, like bread just coming out of the oven, and taken in a large quantity it exhales a delicate, savory odor. It is very productive. In good soil a single bushel of wheat will produce five hundred, they say. It is related that the Emperor Augustus's tax-gatherer sent him from Africa nearly four hundred ears from a single grain, and that, in the same way, three hundred and sixty stalks from the same seed were sent to Nero. It is certain that in ordinary years a hectare of wheat land will produce, without exaggeration, from eighteen to twenty hectoliters of grain.

But to make this marvellous fertility possible, there must be certain conditions of soil and cultivation. Wheat does not flourish in all kinds of ground. The parable of the sower is true, even from a material point of view: every seed which does not fall on "good ground," either does not

sprout, or comes up badly. Very calcareous, light soil, without depth, is not suited to wheat: it grows there; but it is miserable, stunted, and the scattered ears on the etiolated stalks do not pay the cultivator for his pains. Wheat requires rich, fresh, argillaceous soil, containing as much silicious sand and sandstone or granite dust as possible. "In a word," says Pierre Joigneaux, "any soil which quickly wears out the iron-work on the plough is excellent for wheat."¹ Wheat grows in it under favorable conditions; it is not likely to be overthrown by any slight puff of wind; it produces a quantity of straw and grain.

Not only must the soil be right for the cultivation of wheat, but it is important that the earth where it is sown be properly manured and dressed. Argillaceous soil must be ploughed three or four times before sowing; a single ploughing suffices if the sowing is over clover, or after a harvest of potatoes.

Finally, one other condition is essential to assure a productive sowing,—it is necessary to choose the seed. Sickly, impoverished, exhausted seed cannot give robust stalks and healthy ears, no more than

¹ P. Joigneaux : *Fields and Meadows*.

a weak or rickety father can give rise to a healthy, solid race. Heredity tells among plants as among men. The sower should choose heavy, shining grain, proceeding from healthy ears, well shaped, grown on a robust stalk. Besides, he must suit his choice to the nature of the soil, and to the season in which the sowing takes place. Wheat sown in March is not of the same sort as that sown in the autumn; they belong to different varieties. Generally the ears of spring wheat have tender beards and not very close bolts. Among the varieties of March wheat may be mentioned the Polish wheat, summer unbearded wheat; Bengal wheat, with black beards; Sicilian wheat, the miraculous wheat with branching, bearded ears, etc.

In autumn ordinary wheat is sown, known under the name of Winter wheat, unbearded, the grain of which is very solid and farinaceous. They sow also a wheat by the name of red Egyptian, with long beards, full straw, and very full ears; and finally, a third kind of bearded wheat, with long ears, but very close,—Philadelphia wheat.

When once the land is prepared, and the seed ready, there is nothing to do but to begin the great



SOWING THE SEED.

work of sowing. Wheat is sown from the middle of September until about Saint Martin's Day (the 11th of November). The longer you wait, the better is the season; but in the matter of seed-sowing, you cannot choose your time, but are at the mercy of the weather. In these autumn days, especially from the time of the equinox, the temperature is excessively variable; rains are likely to come, and then how can sowing be done advantageously, when water is standing in the rich, argillaceous soil? In this kind of soil, moreover, the sooner the sowing is done, the less seed it takes. Generally two hectoliters of seed are used to the hectare.

The sower takes the grain in a shallow sack, which he carries tied around his waist. In Touraine he uses a basket called *paillon*. He walks with measured steps through the furrows, and scatters the seed by handfuls, describing the arc of a circle. This great act of seed-sowing is as beautiful as a religious ceremony. It gives sculptural attitudes to the veriest boor. Its breadth and majesty have always impressed painters and poets.

La Fontaine has described, —

“That hand which circles through the air;”

and Victor Hugo has sung in beautiful verse : —

“ Above the furrows of the field
His tall dark form stands out ;
In what the flight of time may yield,
‘Tis clear he has no doubt.

He marches through the endless plain,
He comes and goes ; the seed
He scatters ; then begins again. . . .

One of the great painters of rustic life, my friend Bastien Lepage, was also impressed with the simple beauty of this primordial operation of seed-sowing ; and he determined to make it the subject of a picture as important as that of “Hay-making.” He had even made a sketch, which I remember to have seen for a long time in his studio. It represented a ploughed field on a slope at sunset ; a man in his shirt-sleeves was scattering his last handfuls of seed. Nothing but this bare field, with its freshly turned furrows tinged with the oblique rays of the setting sun, and this man standing out on the brown earth bathed in sunlight. This study had a touch of rustic poetry and a peculiar flavor about it; death prevented the artist from making a picture from it.

For my part, I have kept the deep impression

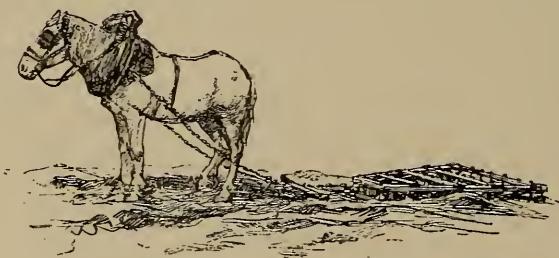
made by an afternoon in the fields at the time of the autumn seed-sowing.

It was in Upper Savoy, not far from Lake Annecy, in October. I was walking along by the edge of a wood of chestnut-trees covering the slope of a promontory named the Welcome Rock. Just as I reached the top, I heard the drawling chant of a peasant singing at the top of his voice; and leaping over a ditch bordered by a hedge of blackthorn, I saw on the plain, in a freshly ploughed field, the singer walking with measured steps, as he scattered in the furrows handfuls of grain which he took from the bag hanging from his belt. His thick-set figure stood out against the lapis lazuli of the lake, the dark surface of which, from the height I had reached, could be seen framed by the mountains.

In the woods the ripe chestnuts were falling on the moss with a dull thud; in the ploughed field the handfuls of grain were scattered in the stony furrows with a light metallic sound; and the peasant, with his regular circular motion, was cadencing, so to speak, the drawling syllables of his rustic song, of which I could hardly distinguish any except the last prolonged *ad libitum*. The voice with

its caressing notes, the warm afternoon, the falling of the yellow leaves and ripe fruit, the grain intrusted to the earth, the azure of the lake, the lofty summits rising half veiled in mist,—all this was as exalting as a *sursum corda*; one felt stirred by a tender, soothing, comforting emotion, taking hold of the heart and gently bedewing the eyes.

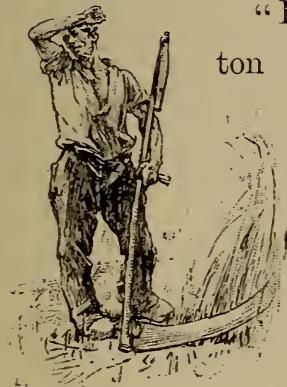
When the grain is in the furrows, it is covered by means of a last, light ploughing, or more frequently by passing the harrow over the sown field. And now, little grain of wheat, rest in the brown earth through the rude winter months! The snow will cover you softly, and under its moist white mantle you will silently germinate. Then, when at Candlemas the February rains shall have melted the ice and soaked the mould, you will push out your first shoot, and soon your slender blades will come up in close lines, covering the whole surface of the field with a green hope of fertility.





VII.

THE HARVEST.



"IN the month of May," says a Breton proverb, "rye reaches above the hedge." Wheat is not as advanced, but it is already very high. Watered by the April rains it grows rapidly, and with it a vagabond vegetation of parasitic plants appear between the knotty stalks, at the bottom of which the growing ear can already be discerned. These foreigners must not be allowed to rob the earth of the nourishing juice which should help to swell the budding ear; and the time has

come to undertake the work of weeding, which is intrusted to the women and children. This is called clearing away the thistles, *échardonnage*. The weeding is done with old knives, or better, with the aid of a tool terminated by a little blade crooked like a trowel, allowing the weeds to be removed, by means of a long handle, without bending over too much, and without treading upon the young stalks of wheat. Although this is woman's work, yet, when the sun's rays already fall warm and perpendicular, it is fatiguing; and more than one young girl straightens herself up completely exhausted when the rising crescent moon of May announces the end of the day.

However carefully this work of weeding may be done, there will still be left in the field a few chance interlopers which have escaped the hoe, and, growing slyly in the shade, in June suddenly mingle their blossoming tops with the green ears ready to open. In the waving billows of wheat, already in the ear, are seen blooming here and there corn-flowers blue as the sky, scarlet poppies, pink fennel flowers, and blue larkspur. When the sun bursts over the trembling fields, the play of bright colors against the light green background of the wheat is a sweet sight for the eyes.

But of all the field flowers, the most precious, if not the most showy, is the humble blossom of the wheat. A poet taken away too soon from literature, Charles Reynaud, has worthily chanted its praise in the following verses: —

“ Thou who without pretensions noddest
On thy bearded stalk complete,
O flower laborious and modest,
The little flower of wheat !

• • • • •
Thou art no rose, nor famed for beauty,
Yet dost in freedom grow ;
And for mankind thy generous duty
Makes ceaseless manna flow !

In thy *corolla* now is holden
The ripe grain’s puissant power ;
The sun’s rays make it rich and golden,
The bread comes from thy flour !”

With the exception of the word *corolla*, which is inexact, as properly speaking the blossom of the wheat has no *corolla*, Charles Reynaud’s poetry very happily characterizes the *moral* beauty, so to speak, of this little flower scarcely visible to the eye, the unseen nuptials of which will give birth to the grain so nutritious to humanity.

In order that these fruitful nuptials may be cele-

brated under the best conditions, it is necessary to have the weather lend assistance. The sun must not be too scorching; and, above all, there must be no heavy rain, which, unfortunately, often falls about the time of Saint Médard's Day; the best of all is when the sky is lightly covered, "young maiden's weather, neither rain nor sun." Then the pollen slowly and surely fecundates the ovarium, and each glume of wheat forms a milky grain. Then comes the strong sunshine of dog-days, and the heavy ear will bend its golden head. The whole plain will rock its waving surface of brownish-yellow in the wind; and at evening, under the sky sparkling with stars, a savory odor of ripe wheat will rise in the warm air.

Now comes Messidor, the harvest month, the *métives* as it is called in the west. The scorched earth cracks and bursts open, the stalks of wheat have already taken on their beautiful straw color. This is the propitious time for reaping the harvest. If it is delayed too long, the birds will deduct the tithe from the ripe fields, where the grain is already dropping from the ear. In the villages, on the farms, everything is ready; the tools are in good condition, the withes for binding are prepared, the



REAPING.

teams have been examined, and provisions have been laid in for feeding the harvesters, hired and engaged in advance. The help are generally engaged in the *assemblées*, or at the *fêtes* on patron saints' days preceding the harvest. The recruited workmen often belong in the neighborhood; sometimes they come from a distance in numbers. Some poor villages make a specialty of furnishing harvesters to the level countries where cereals abound. On large farms they hire a whole army of Belgian laborers, who arrive on a certain day with their utensils, and bivouac in the barns.

In the early dawn, long before the sun rises, they start for the fields. During the overpowering heat of August, it is almost impossible to work in the middle of the day, and the larger part of the labor is done in the cool morning hours. The harvesters form a line across the field, each standing by a ridge or furrow, and pushing straight before him. The leader of the gang, or *ordon*, goes ahead, and the others follow; while behind, a second overseer urges on the stragglers, and makes sure that the work is conscientiously and methodically done. The wheat is reaped with the sickle, or is laid on the ground with the scythe. As the wheat

falls, it is disposed in swaths on the ground or in sheaves.

When the weather is cloudy or the wind cool, this rough work of harvesting is accomplished without much suffering; but when the sun darts its rays from an implacable blue sky above, there comes a time when the harvesters, both men and women, literally water the sheaves with their sweat. The crude, blinding light dazzles them; the heat burns the nape of their necks and their backs. All around them the air is flaming; the earth is burning under their feet, and the monotonous sound of the grasshoppers in the stubble fairly stuns them. Towards noon they can do no more. After hastily despatching the lunch brought to them from the village or the farm, they all stretch themselves out on the ground, trying to shield their heads in the meagre shade of some hedge or of a block of unreaped grain, and fall into a feverish sleep, interrupted by the vexatious biting of flies.

The work is taken up again when the great heat is over, and is carried on till nightfall. Then the bands of harvesters leave the fields already half stripped, and with heavy steps make their way beneath the sky bespangled with stars to the

house of the farmer employing them. There they find a supper of bacon and cabbages, with sour wine for drink, and in the barn a bundle of straw for a bed. On many farms the men and women used to sleep helter-skelter on the litter in these common dormitories; but to-day the customs have changed for the better, and they have more respect for propriety. The large farmers who engage laborers of both sexes for the harvest lodge them in separate places. All of them sleep the sound sleep of people who have worked all day long, and the next morning the hard labor of reaping begins again beneath the implacable August sun.

This stubborn work is continued until all the fields have been reaped. Then they collect the last sheaves in a wagon trimmed with flowers and foliage, and the whole band of harvesters get into it and sing. In the eastern provinces this is called *killing the dog*; in the central and western provinces the ceremony is more solemn, and is called the festival of the sheaves, or the harvesters' *beurlot*.

I remember one of these festivals at which I was present in my early youth, in an out-of-the-way place on the boundary between Berry and Poitou.

The sky was of a pure blue; the oblique rays of the declining sun lighted up the whole valley; the stubble seemed to crackle under its blazing rays; the air was full of the trembling peculiar to days of great heat. In the dazzling light the peasants, with arms, neck, and breast bare, were raising the sheaves on the points of their pitchforks, and throwing them to the women perched on the top of the wagons. The latter, wearing only a cotton skirt and waist tied at the neck with a drawing-string, stood out white against the blue of the sky and the golden brown of the sheaves. Across the meadow, under the shade of a screen of poplar-trees, they were preparing a table for the supper, which the proprietor of the domain was giving to his farmers and their harvesters. About six o'clock a hurdy-gurdy player struck up a *bouffée*, and the loaded wagons drawn by yoked oxen began to move along.

They went down towards the plain just as the sun, already low, was beginning to cast the long shadows of the poplar-trees over the meadows. In front of the last team was fastened the queen sheaf, tied with ribbons and flowers, and terminated by a cross made of ears of the wheat. Near the

oxen, beside the driver, the hurdy-gurdy player was turning his crank. The whole troop of harvesters followed one after another,—the old farmers first; after them the reapers with the sickles and jackets over their shoulders; then the gatherers and binders of the sheaves, walking three by three; lastly the little people,—funny little boys and girls, bare-legged and frowsy-headed,—casting longing eyes towards the great table loaded with cold meats and pastry.

When the wagons reached the threshold of the barn, the hurdy-gurdy stopped playing. Then two farmers, two old men, took down the be-ribboned sheaf, and placed it solemnly in front of the proprietors of the domain:—

“Our master, our mistress, and the present company,” said the eldest, taking off his hat, “here is the little sheaf. The good God has given it, we have reaped it, and we present it to you that the present year may bring happiness and plenty to your house.”

A bottle was brought out. The old man filled a glass with it, lifted it as high as his eyes, then scattered a few drops over the ears, and bowing again, said:—

"To your health, our master and our mistress, and also to the health of the sheaf!"

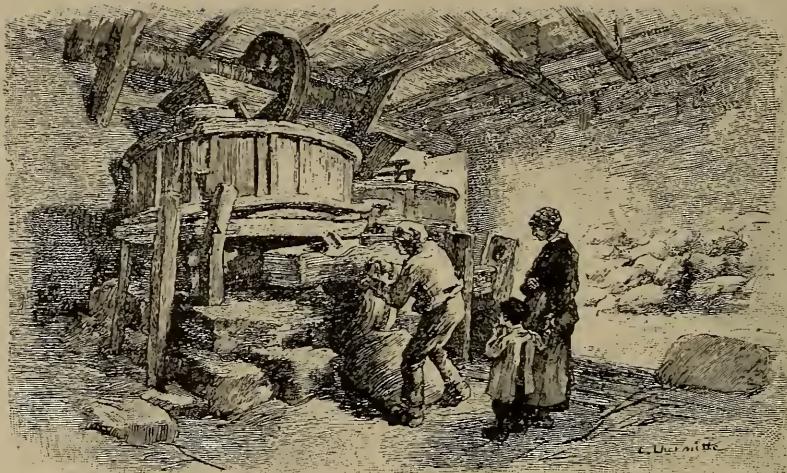
And gravely, slowly, he emptied his glass.

There was something touching,—a strange simplicity and grandeur like an ancient idyl—in the consecration of this beautiful golden wheat by the peasant who had sown it and harvested it in the sweat of his brow, in this libation made in the broad sunshine, in honor of the fruit of the year's hard work.

After the harvesters, in the despoiled fields, through the stubble sharp as needles, come the gleaners like thin, brown grasshoppers. Bowed over, with watchful eyes, they gather up in their aprons the scattered ears fallen from the sheaves, and which the binder has neglected to bind. It is a privilege everywhere granted to the poorest women of the neighboring parishes; a sort of superstition is attached to this ancient practice dating back to Bible times. The owner of a piece of wheat would think that it would bring bad luck to his harvest if he should refuse the gleaners to come into the field. However, gleaning is subject to unwritten rules, which the privileged are obliged to observe. It can only take place in broad day-

light, and, as it were, under the overseer's eye. In this way they wish to prevent them from carrying away the sheaves, which would be an easy undertaking if the gleaners could wander at night through the fields still covered with swaths. As soon as twilight comes on, the rural guard in a loud voice announces that the gleaning is over. Then in the evening, lighted by the slender sickle of the new moon, the gleaners slowly, and with seeming regret, go away, while the wagons loaded with sheaves roll heavily towards the barn.





VIII.

THE BREAD.



WHEN the wheat has been reaped and made into sheaves, it is housed or disposed in stacks, as near as possible to the farm-buildings. In a great many provinces the system of stacks is preferred, because the grain is better preserved in that way, and besides, it is safer from the teeth of mice and rats. These rodents are the plague of barns. The peasants used to accuse witches of sending these robbers of the grain to

them; and they all had a repertory of superstitious formulas for driving away the devastating mass of mice and field-mice. Here is one of these country exorcisms practised in the Ardennes. It was sufficient to write on little bits of new paper the following words: —

“Rats, you who have eaten the heart of Saint Gertrude, I conjure you in her name to go away into the plain of . . .”

These pieces of paper are placed in holes where the rats pass, taking care to grease the paper well, and roll it into little balls. Here is another one more malicious, and containing a bit of Gallic humor: —

“Taupes et mulots,
Sortez de l'enclos !
Allez chez le curé ;
Beurre et lait,
Vous y trouverez,
Tout à pleinté.¹”

¹ Field-mice and moles,
Come out of your holes !
Go to the curé's ;
And eat at your ease
Butter and milk
As much as you please.

TARBE : *Romancero de la Champagne.*

With the system of stacks, the mischief of the rodents is not so great; they attack only the first bed of sheaves, while in barns all the sheaves next the walls are damaged. In Normandy and Picardy these stacks, which are shaped like enormous soup-tureens adorned with their covers, and are scattered over the bare fields, give a decided character to the appearance of the plains. At my home, in Lorraine, they are familiar only with the custom of housing the grain. As soon as the harvest is reaped, they pile it up in the *sinaux*, the name they give to their barns; and there it awaits the time for thrashing.

This operation usually takes place in the fall, when the time for meeting bills arrives, and the peasant needs to turn his wheat into money. In the south they make a thrashing-floor for the ears, on which mules and horses walk. The ear, trodden under the feet of the animals, is shaken off the stalk; and the grain is then gathered up and winnowed on the thrashing-floor. In the east thrashing is still done in the barn, by means of flails. The sticks, handled by men, fall with measured strokes on the heap of grain, while a thick dust rises around the thrashers. In spite of this dust

from the *débris* of straw, which affects the throat, the workmen sometimes sing to mark the rhythmical fall of the flails : —

Ho! companions, wield the flail!
Beat the husks, and labor gayly!
Whate'er comes I never fail
On my sweetheart to think daily!
Poverty may woes entail,
Yet to her my thoughts turn daily!
Ho! companions, wield the flail,
Beat the husks, and labor gayly.

This thrashing with men's arms is hard work ; the peasants in their energetic language have called it the inflammation-of-the-lungs-machine. So, in many parts of the country, the thrashing-machine, hired by the day, has taken the place of flails. Its use tends to become general ; and in the peaceful September and October afternoons, the heavy rumble of these thrashers at the barn-doors is heard everywhere. After the wheat is thrashed and winnowed, it is put into bags ; and the peasant carries his bags to market, after having reserved enough for his own use.

And now the mills must take up the work, — windmills with great revolving wings, on the plains far away from the rivers ; water-mills in the copi-

ously watered valleys. Oh! these humble water-mills, hidden in the recesses of wooded glens, and unfortunately almost everywhere replaced by the great flour-mills, how delightfully they are situated, and what a homely charm they give to the landscape! Perched astride the brook, a hundred steps from the meadows, their mossy buildings rise in the shade of willows and white poplars, which send forth their slender, graceful trunks out of the spongy, moist soil, often to a great height. Their leafy tops unite above the sleepy waters of the mill-course, where the tangled branches and bits of sky are clearly reflected. The light gently sifts through all this foliage; the scale of greens is complete, from the ashy green of the willows to the dark green of the alders. And in this solitude, made fragrant by the odor of mint, brightened by the flight of kingfishers and the hopping wagtails, the mill, with its flour-covered threshold, murmurs its lively tick-tack from morning till night.

In the mill-pond, after whirling
Restive-swirling,
Leaps the stream in foamy white!
Freed, it turns the big wheel dripping,
Then forth slipping,
Gleams with bubbles diamond bright.

In the mill the miller gayly
Grinds his daily
Grist of grain, and like a bird
Whistles, while his wife is sitting,
Busy knitting ;—
Every stitch brings out a word !

When at dusk the full moon's splendor
Falls with tender
Radiance, then 'tis fine to trace
From the mill the great red kine
In a line
Hastening to the watering-place.

Now the dry, cool breeze awaking
Comes, down-shaking
From the leaves the mill-wheel's rain,
And the stars in cloudless weather
Walk together,
Telling all their loves again!

When the miller has finished his task, and the flour, sifted by the bolter, swells the whitish linen bags, the baker comes upon the scene, and then the work of bread-making begins.

If a ball of wheat dough is washed under a stream of water, and continually manipulated, the water gradually carries away the starch and soluble substances, and a grayish mass is left, which is extremely elastic when wet; this is gluten. This

substance, distributed through the flour, absorbs water, and gives wheat dough its characteristic elasticity; it is this, also, which holds the gas produced by fermentation. Indeed, if the dough is left in a place heated to twenty or twenty-five degrees C., it is soon noticeable that this dough is undergoing a change; it develops an alcoholic, acid odor; the mass softens, and swells more or less. This is the time, when, mixed with water and flour, this acid paste, called leaven, communicates its fermentation to the whole mass, and becomes susceptible of producing bread, when it is carried to the oven. Such are the principles of bread-making.

The night before, the baker prepares his leaven by immersing it in a certain quantity of water and then adding flour to it, to make a lump of dough. Then in the morning, very early, he takes this dough, called *the first raising*, begins a second operation like the first, and so on until the whole is just right. Then he adds salt to it, and works the lump of dough again, pulling it with his hands, by lifting it and turning it quickly in the kneading-trough, over and over again. This is the kneading,—hard work, which is not accomplished without

complaints and fatigue. The groans uttered by the baker, who is bare to his waist, have given him the nickname of *geindre*—the groaner. When the dough is right, the mass is divided into loaves, which the baker gives a convenient shape by rolling them on the kneading-board, powdered with flour. Then he throws each loaf into an osier basket, and places it before the oven. The dough, which is coated with an egg, swells during this time; they say then that it is *sur couche*. When the oven is suitably heated, the baker puts the loaves into it, on a wooden shovel floured with a little bran. As soon as the bread is in the oven, the opening is closed, and they wait till the baking is done.

I remember, as though it were only yesterday, one of these bakeries in my native town, situated at the foot of the college hill, and where I used to go in winter to warm myself and read over my lessons, while I was waiting for the hour of going to school. The oven was blazing. The dough had been taken from the kneading-trough; the loaves of bread, dusted with flour, were each reposing in its round basket; and the baker, dressed in a long swan-skin jacket, was putting them into the oven

on the wide beech-wood shovel. Birch sticks had been lighted at the mouth of the oven, and were burning brightly, casting a white light, and dancing in the deep vault, where the round, swelling loaves could be seen standing in symmetrical rows. The gay illumination lighted up the ceiling, where shovels and pokers were hung horizontally, and cast on the floury walls the strange shadow of the baker, busy rubbing his bare arms to remove the lumps of dough sticking to them.

After a certain length of time, the mouth of the oven was opened, and the crusty loaves, exhaling a good smell of warm bread, were quickly taken out. And then it was a joy and a delight to bite into the rolls while they were still hot.

In the country, especially on the farms, they rarely go to the bakery. The housewife makes the bread herself. She bakes it usually at home, for in comfortable households it is rare not to find a bakehouse belonging to the house. However, in some villages there still exists a common oven, which is heated once a week, and where the housekeepers themselves take turns in baking their bread. It is an interesting sight to see all these women, seated under the arched roof of the



BREAD-MAKING.

oven, built in the centre of the commune, and waiting for it to be heated to the right degree. From time to time the mouth of the oven is opened, and a red gleam of burning embers lights up the young or old faces of the peasant women as they peaceably chatter, with one arm around the basket where the dough is raising.

The housekeeper bakes for a week, and even a fortnight, large, thick loaves, which are put away on shelves suspended from the beams, and are used very sparingly. Besides, the peasant, who knows how much trouble it is to raise wheat, has a pious respect for it. To lose a piece of bread by throwing it into the street, is regarded as sacrilege. You ought to see the housekeeper cut the first slice from a loaf of bread! She proceeds to the operation as if it were a religious ceremony. In the first place, she never fails to make the sign of the cross with her knife on the under crust; she believes that the house where this formality is forgotten is threatened by a near misfortune. Then she cuts each slice with solemn slowness, and carefully gathers up the crumbs scattered on the table. This almost solemn fashion of cutting the bread always impressed me as a child, and filled my mind with a profound

respect for this food, so indispensable to the larger part of humanity,—for this bread, which costs so much labor, and of which at the present time so many miserable mortals are unable to eat their fill.





THE VINE.

WHEN, on the cloth my elbows resting,
The generous vintage I am testing,
 In visions sweet before mine eyes,
O hillsides of my native county,
With lines of vines in beauteous bounty,
 From plain to woodland ye arise!

When Vergil's hyacinth is blooming,—
The breeze with strong, sweet scent perfuming,

In March, the vine-plants dry and sere,
Their twisted stems with branches gnarly,
Against the brown soil, hard and marly,
Like lifeless, hopeless stumps appear.

But April's sap comes swiftly leaping,
And sets the budded vine-shoots weeping.

How rich and dense the leaves in May!
The perfume of blossoming vines is carried
On June night breezes to be married
To fragrance of the ripened hay!

And now the cooper's mallet resounding
Is heard in every vineyard, rounding
The bulging sides of empty casks;
The green grape swells, and in September
The cluster, yellow-pale as amber,
In mellow sunlight ripening basks!

O vintage-time! . . . along the valleys
Ring out the merry laughs and sallies
Of voices harsh and voices fine!
And from the wine-vat, boiling, steaming,
And from the wine-press, ruddy gleaming,
Leaps like a brook the new-born wine.

Hail! light wine of our hills! I greet thee!
Where'er mid alien scenes I greet thee,
And taste thee fragrant as thou art,
The good old days arise before me,
And all my vanished youth comes o'er me,
And all its joys swell high my heart.





IX.

THE VINEYARD IN SPRING.



MARCH is drawing to an end. Showers have melted the last snows, the north-west wind has dried up the ditches, and in the orchards on the edge of the woods the blackbird whistles loudly to announce the coming of spring. In reality it has already arrived officially; but its presence is hardly yet manifested, except by a brighter red in the osier-bed, and here and there by the expanding catkins on the hazel-trees and willows. The blackthorn bushes have no leaves as yet; but, after two or three days of sunshine, they will be all snowy with white blossoms. Beneath, the grass grows green and thick; and at every step

the birds, building their nests, dart out from the hedge, and fly off close to the ground. The pastures have kept their gray color; but the greenish corollas of the hellebore, and the magnificent violet flowers of the anemone pulsatilla, are already opening.

In the reddish-yellow, clayey soil in the vineyards on the slopes, not a suspicion of verdure is as yet to be noticed; nothing but the ochre-colored clay and the black, knotty vines. But, here and there a peach-tree lifts its branches, powdered with bright pink; then, looking at it more closely, about two inches from the ground a little plant of the liliaceous family is seen, with a tiny scape terminated by a thyrsus of little violet blue flowers. This is the hyacinth, or *muscari à grappe*, called also “dog’s garlic.” This plant abounds in our vineyards; and I can never think of its sweet plum-like odor without seeing again in my mind our hillsides, red with the twisted vines and the first spring days. The perfume of this humble flower recalls to my eyes the vine-covered landscape of my own province. A modest, quiet landscape: below, the river with its stony bed, and shallow waters flowing between two trembling rows of Italian poplars; then beyond,

the meadows, in the south and east, round hills covered with vineyards with their short, leafy vines. From springtime until autumn the vineyards on the slopes overlook the terraced town to the north, with its convent, its steeples, and its clock-tower standing out against more distant vineyards; and from May to October these vine-clad hills, with their branches growing green in June and purple in September, delight the eye of the townspeople.

The blossoming of the hyacinth to the vine-dressers is like a signal to begin work. They prune the vines and tie them up, two operations bringing along the slopes a multitude of workmen bending over the vine-branches.

When the sap begins to work in the branches, pruning is done in order to multiply and perfect the fruit. It is a more simple matter than with other trees, because, as grapes come only on the buds of the year, it is sufficient, in order to work well, to remember that the small buds are the ones which bear the most fruit. The general rule is to preserve one or two eyes on the shoots of the previous year. The sap rises vigorously; it reaches the end of the cut branch, and in the impetuosity of its rising it exudes at first in limpid



PRUNING THE VINES.

drops. Then they say that “the vine weeps,” and claim that these tears from the vine are a sovereign remedy for troubles of the eyes. But it is, as it were, only the overflow of the sap, hanging in little drops at the end of the branches. The best of this nourishing juice feeds and swells the fleecy bud, which opens and shows the rudiments of leaves, yellow, tender, and cottony. Let the sunshine come, and all will begin to grow green.

Unfortunately, during this season of adolescence, the vineyard has two merciless enemies,—the April rains and hoar frost. Too abundant rain leads to an excessive development of buds and leaves, at the expense of the fruit; the hoar frost causes still more disastrous consequences.

In the beginning of spring, on calm nights, although the temperature of the air may be above zero, it happens that in the morning the surface of the ground is covered with a layer of little beads of ice very near together. This resembles a sort of hoar frost, or rather it is simply the dew formed in consequence of a chilling of the lower strata of air, and suddenly congealed by a rapid evaporation in a clear sky. The tender buds on the vine, often still damp from the heavy showers

of the day before, suffer more particularly from this sudden congealing. The ice taking up more space than the water, the organism of the plant is destroyed by the formation of these slender icicles formed in the tissues. Then the rising sun, coming after this hoar frost, cruelly scorches the young shoots, and finishes the disaster.

You should see the pitiful appearance of the vineyard after one of these cruel nights. The buds, yesterday swollen and red, have been burned and singed as it were; they emit a sort of dust under the fingers. Then you should hear the cries of the vine-dressers, whose future harvest is seriously compromised in a single night. In vineyard countries such an event assumes the proportions of a general calamity. They often make it out worse than it really is; and although they may have been more scared than hurt, the crafty make a great to-do with the secret hope of raising the price of wine.

It is especially between Saint George's Day and Saint Urban's Day, during the dreaded period of the "ice-saints," that frost is feared for the vines.

"A prettier month you'll never meet,
Than April without its hat of sleet."

The nights in May are still more dangerous. Especially in our districts in the east, this month, so much praised by poets, is deplorably variable and capricious. After a warm day, a storm bursts, the rain falls abundantly; then during the night the clouds disappear, a sudden lowering of the temperature follows the rainstorm; and under the starry, cloudless sky, the nocturnal radiation of the heat leads to the formation of hoar frost so fatal to the vineyards.

In order to dissipate the pernicious influences of very clear nights, the vine-dressers have invented what are called *artificial clouds*. The proprietors of an entire district unite together, and in the evening build around the vineyards fires of green branches, arranged in such a way that the wind blows the smoke over the vines. During the entire night these carefully tended fires spread thick moving clouds between the sky and the tender folioles of the buds. They arrest the expansion of the night's radiation, and in the morning intercept the rays of the rising sun, more fatal still to the vines than the cold night. Wherever they can be made, these *artificial clouds* render the greatest service. Not only does the smoke protect the vine-

yard around which they are placed, but oftentimes, driven by the wind, it hovers slowly over the whole valley, following its course, and thus extending its benignant influence over distant vineyards, to which this unexpected protection comes providentially. The proprietors of the latter, who have been asleep, dreaming of disaster, are quite surprised to awake and find their vines unharmed. While they slept, the miracle was wrought.

At last the season becomes more clement; the air grows warm; the cold nights are no longer to be feared; and by Whitsuntide the vineyard is able to flourish in security. The shoots bear both leaves and fruit; they are sterile or fecund, according as they present a pointed or rounded shape. When once expanded they disclose the nodes of young branches, the rudiments of leaves, the buds of grapes, and tendrils with their graceful green ends. The leaf is very decorative, cut in five lobes, intersected by fine veins; it is glossy on the upper side, and underneath of a whitish tint, which turns red later on as it matures. In the middle of June the whole vineyard is covered with this abundant phosphorescent green foliage; and nothing is more harmonious than these green-clad hills spreading out

gently against the blue sky, while from the stony soil in the heat rises the creaking song of the red-winged grasshoppers. In the warmth and the light the little grape buds softly unfold, and the vine blossoms expand,—a humble flower, as modest as that of the wheat, scarcely showing its five pale-green petals, and its fine, dainty yellow stamens. But if the flower passes unnoticed, what a delicious perfume it sheds!

During the nights in June, about Saint John's Day, it is a delight to wander over our hills, when the grape blossoms open their greenish corollas. A seductive, virginal odor is spread through the whole valley. It is not the heady perfume of the wine, but it is the harbinger of it. In the pure exquisite breath of the blossoming vine, one can imagine all the intoxication which will come from the ripe, fermented grape. Thus the ideal reveries of youth presage the effervescent enthusiasms of full maturity.

This odor intoxicates you, gently, chastely, but still it intoxicates. When it spreads into the valley and reaches the town, the young people with their elbows on the window-sills begin to dream of love; the young girls feel seized with

an indefinable languor; and the old men dream again, with a sigh of regret, of their past youth. They even say that down in the cellars, in the casks where it is kept, the wine of other years feels the influence of the odor exhaling from the grape blossoms, and it ferments and bubbles so as to crack the hoops.

How tenderly this fragrance is exhaled from the blossoming vines on the hillsides of Touraine, where I used to go to breathe it at the rising of the moon!

Between St. Cyr and Luynes there lies a lovely valley:

There long ago, one June, when the slopes were clad with vines,

The gentle summer night seemed on the hills to dally,

While in the sunken roads glowworms drew gleaming lines.

When for a festal scene thy Fair One smoothies her tresses,

There is a balmy, intoxicating-sweet perfume

Floats from her snowy breast and radiant lovelinesses:

So did ye fill the night with fragrance, Vines-in-bloom!

The moon was rising like a young queen fair and slender,

And over slumbrous meadows and vine leaves broad and green

There spread a silvery glow,—the aureole of her splendor,—

And then light steps were heard the clustering vines between.

A girl of twenty years, with timid foot advancing,

Stole down the shadowy path with shy, unconscious grace.

I saw the moonbeams on her delicate features glancing,
I saw the lovelight kindling in her lovely face.

How black, against the pallor of her face contrasting,
Gleamed her keen eyes,—restless and wild and shy!
But from a clustering clump of medlars eager hastening
Came forth a youth, and met the maiden joyously.

O Vines! in summertide when grapes are turning
The old wine in the cellars also feels the spell!
And when the fragrance rises, then with passionate yearning
Young love awakes, young love! and hearts begin to swell!

This odor of young grape-buds freshly opened, and the other penetrating fragrance of the hyacinth during Easter week, are mingled in my memory like two sister sensations: one more innocent, more childlike, as delicate as the first verdure of spring; the other more keen, more burning, bringing with it the ardor of summer, and the restlessness of senses awakened by the unfolding of the twentieth year. Alas! and both are now nothing but far-away memories! No matter! I am like the old wine confined in casks; and when these odors come back to me, called forth by the first leaves on the willows, and the first blossoms, I cannot help trembling. Like Goethe's poet, I cry out in the spring: —

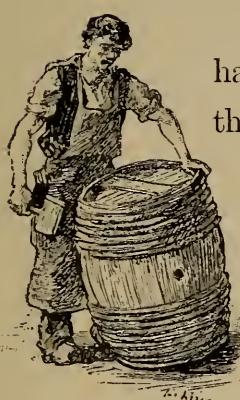
“ O, give me back my youth once more !
Give back my school-days gay and bright,
When with glad heart and footsteps light
I climbed our ruddy hillsides o'er,
Where, mid young vines with blossoms crowned,
Blue hyacinths carpeted the ground.”





X.

THE COOPER.



WHEN the July and August suns have made the green grapes grow in the vineyard; when, in the first days of September, the bunches, according to the expression of vine-dressers, begin to turn, that is to say become red and black,—the owners of the vineyards prepare for the vintage. They examine the empty barrels, clean them, put them in good order, and if the vintage promises to be abundant they gradually lay in a supply of casks.

The coopers' shops are in full blast. From all sides, during these warm September days, the sound of the hammer is heard on the staves, accompanied by the characteristic clanking of the chains used to clean the casks. This merry noise rising in the morning through the sonorous air, and filling the neighborhood of the wine-presses with a temporary animation, is like the forerunner of the merriment and bustle of the vintage. I never hear it without the poetical refrain of one of Pierre Dupont's songs coming to my lips : —

“Pon ! pon ! pon ! pon ! oh mallet ringing !
Make firm the hoops around the tun,
To hold the new wine joyance-bringing,
Aurora's ruby son !”

The cooper is master of the situation at this time of year. He lays down the law in the vineyards ; the vine-growers are obliged to submit to him, and accept the price that he imposes upon them. His shop, the large windows of which open on the street, is never in want of work from morning till night : —

Beneath the shed old casks and unused barrels,
And hoops and staves and tuns of bulging shape
(Wherein will soon ferment the ripened grape),
Lie in great heaps upon the square brick carrels ;

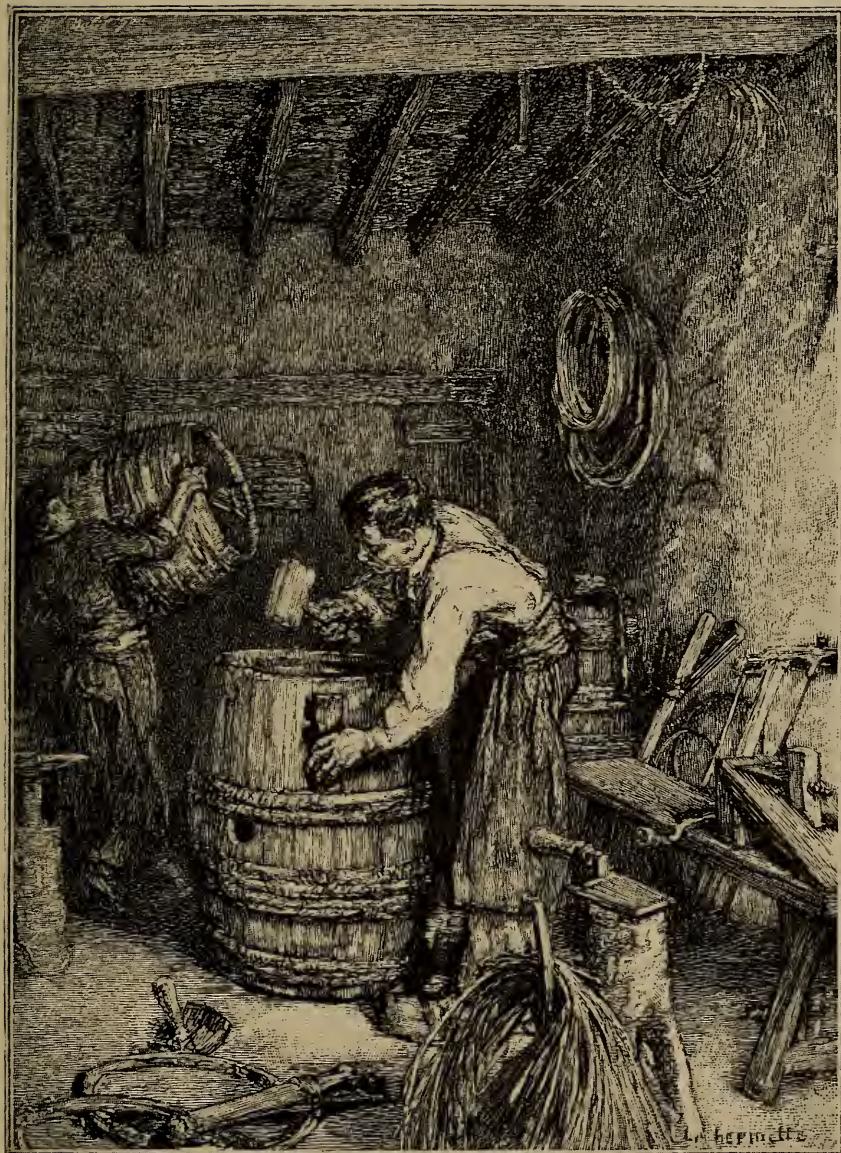
And now the workmen and the masters drain
One final glass, and then, with gay refrain
Accented by the ringing mallets, measure
The needful lumber in the cooper's treasure.

Generally the master cooper is not a source of melancholy. His noisy trade has too much relation with the cellars where good wine is growing old for him not to have a weakness for *September's soup*, as it is familiarly called. Besides, to his principal occupation, he adds, in the dull season, others accessory and subsequent, which give him a gentle inclination towards sensuality and jollity. He is in the habit of taking care of his customers' wine; he bottles it; moreover, he is a wine-taster. He even acquires in this special branch very valuable artistic knowledge. His taste grows refined, and acquires rare sensibility. It is enough for him to pour out a few drops of wine into his silver cup, and to sip it smacking his lips, to tell not only the country, but the age, of the wine. The story of the two cooper wine-tasters called to give their opinion on a landlord's wine is well known. The first said, after tasting it, "This wine is good; but it tastes of leather." The second tasted it afterwards, and said, "I do not

share my friend's opinion. This wine is good; but it tastes of iron." The landlord's astonishment was great, as he swore that his wine had never been in contact with leather or iron. However, when the barrel was empty, they found at the very bottom a little nail to which was fastened a piece of leather, and which had fallen accidentally into the cask. And thus the subtle knowledge of the two wine-tasters was demonstrated.

The cooper is an artist in his way, because, in order to have a cask for containing a liquid as delicate and as changeable as wine answer its purpose to perfection, it is necessary to have it made by a master workman; and, besides, the choice of materials and the putting into shape require special knowledge, instinct, and a skilful hand.

The barrels or casks are composed of several boards or staves held together side by side by bands, and representing as a whole a sort of short, hollow cylinder, bulging in the middle, cut off and closed at the two ends. The part of the cask showing the greatest diameter is called the belly, or bulge. They give the name of *merrain*, or staff-wood, to the wood employed to make the staves; the wood for the bottom is called more



THE COOPER.

especially *traversin*. The staff-wood and the *traversin* are quartered after the sap-wood has been removed; they need to be well cut, dry, free from knots and defects. They seldom use anything but oak for this work; because the purpose for which the cask is intended demands, for the materials composing it, a close-grained wood which will not easily decay. The best staff-wood is taken from the heart of sound trees, and selected among the largest. Chestnut or beech-wood may also be used; but soft woods, white woods, which would cause leakage, and all woods which from their nature might communicate a foreign odor to the wine, must be rejected. Casks made from the heart of the beech-wood have, it is said, the advantage of preserving delicate and weak wines a longer time. But when this species is used, precaution must be taken to select the staves from beech-trees grown in copses, or standing alone. Trees from the thick forest have too soft wood. Besides, it is important to make the staves from beeches which the worms have not had time to eat. Nevertheless, no matter how carefully selected the beech-wood may be, it is inferior to oak. The wine loses much less in quantity and in bouquet in casks made with oak-

staves, the close, compact fibre of which prevents the liquid from easily soaking through.

When the staves are all ready, and there is nothing to be done but putting on the hoops, they form what is called a *tonneau en botte*. When they have been held together at the upper end by an iron hoop, and when this part of the cask has assumed a cylindrical shape, a fire of shavings is lighted underneath, to facilitate the curving of the staves; then when the cask has been properly curved, the heads are put on, and the two ends are united by means of wooden hoops, driven on with a hammer.

The making of these hoops forms an independent preliminary operation. The hoops are made by special workmen called hoop-makers, whose workshops, like those of the sabot-makers, are generally established in the forest. Hoop-making exists in all the forests near the vine countries. In the suburbs of Paris and of Fontainebleau, in Touraine and Périgord, they make chestnut hoops principally. The forest of Orléans furnishes a large quantity of birch hoops; in Lorraine, in Champagne, and Bourgogne, where the chestnut-tree does not grow, they use principally hoops of hazel-wood and wil-

low ; but as they are inferior in quality, they mingle with them a certain number of oak hoops in binding the cask together. Really the best hoops are those made of wood from very straight oaks, from fifteen to eighteen years old ; however, as these timbers are only found in excellent land, the oak hoop is rare and dear.

The art of hoop-making is very simple ; nevertheless, it requires intelligence and skill to be advantageously practised. A good workman can make on an average, when he is working in chestnut, three hundred hoops a day, giving them all necessary strength and evenness.

The workshop, built in the open air, is not very complicated. Four or six forks, planted in the ground, support four quite large poles, on which are crossed smaller poles like rafters ; on these last is placed a roofing of bark and chips. The whole forms a pent-house four metres square and three metres in height, under which the workmen are protected from the sun, and partly secure from the rain. As the wood splits and cuts better when it is green, hoops are made almost exclusively at the time of cutting down the trees, and especially in the spring. While the hoop-makers are at work,

the forest is growing green and blossoming all around ; the work is cheerfully carried on, not far from sun-wrapt glades, while the warblers and black-birds carol loudly the return of spring.

When the wood is cut the proper length, the bark is removed, to prevent as far as possible the chance of its being worm-eaten, the worm preferring to attack the bark. For the same reason the sap-wood is planed off. In the season when the sap is rising, it is easy to remove the bark. It is damp and supple, and comes off like a green coat, and the smooth, white wood is left bare. Then the wood is split lengthwise, in order to make the hoop both flexible and strong ; and it is given the desired curve by putting it through the groove of the *billard*. When the hoop is fashioned, and bound together with withes, the hoop-maker places it in the *parquet*, intended to receive successive rows. This *parquet* is formed by placing on the ground a hoop already made, and driving down stakes all around to form an enclosure, the diameter of which is a little longer than that of the hoops to be piled up in it.

When the cask, supplied with heads, has been put together and hooped on the swollen part, called

the bulging, an opening is made equally distant from both ends; this is the bung-hole.

And now the beautiful oaken cask is perfect, with its chestnut hoops touched with the orange color of the new withes! Its sonorous depth resounds melodiously beneath the last blow of the hammer; its empty, round sides are ready for future vintages. What vintage will it hold in its big-bellied rotundity? What white wine or red, sparkling or generous, will flow with a gurgling sound through the narrow opening of the bung-hole? Full of the liquor which "delights the heart of man," it will repose under the cool arches of the cellar in the vast wine-vaults of the great proprietor, or in the narrow cellar of the vine-grower, until the day when it will start on some long journey. Rocked on a carrier's wagon, carried over the rails, or rolled about in the hold of a ship, it will go out into the world; and into whatever place it goes, it will be welcomed with joy. During the journey may it escape too rough handling, the false gauging of custom-house officers, the fraudulent adulteration of wine-manufacturers, and may it reach its destination with its natural flavor sound and unimpaired!

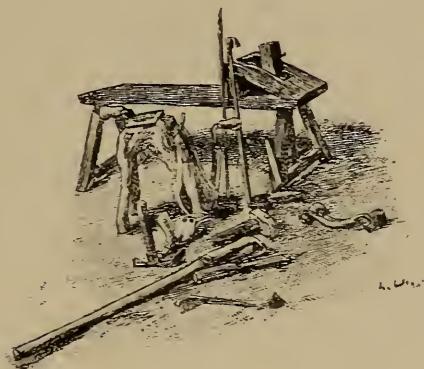
Wherever it goes, if it arrives unharmed, it will

make merry hearts ; it will be gently transported to the cellar ; it will be wisely left to rest on the stilling, from the fatigue of its long journey. Then it will be lifted carefully, and its contents will be tenderly poured into good bottles well sealed with wax ; and from time to time one will be brought up to the table with its white cloth, and opened to celebrate some good news, or to treat old friends. And slowly the cask will become empty and sound hollow.

Have you noticed that there is nothing more melancholy than an empty cask ? I mean a cask which has been full, and the interior of which is exhausted. A new, unused cask is the future with all its promises ! But an empty cask, the sonorous bulging of which resounds sadly, and the staves of which exhale an acrid odor of dregs, presents to the eyes nothing but the heart-rending picture of a happy past forever vanished.

It is related that one day the poet Gustave Mathieu, a great friend of good vintages, seeing a dray loaded with old empty wine-barrels pass along the boulevard, took his stand behind the cart, and with his hat drawn down, slowly followed the deceased casks with as much compunction as if he were following a funeral procession.

And the poet was right! The passing procession was bearing away so many inanimate bodies in which life had once circulated, and young, joyful sap fermented. How many vanished pleasures, how much tumultuous fervor and evaporated enthusiasm, were contained in the empty casks! It was a source of gayety and consolation forever exhausted; and as a pious mourner he was following it across the forgetful, indifferent town.





X I.

THE VINTAGE.



THE whole population, men and women, are in the vineyards from morning till night. The god of the vine dispenses splendid days and radiant nights. One feels a desire to look at all the hillsides and all the valleys at once. Yonder Vaux-de-Naives

hums above the meadows of Parlemaille, and a great wood makes a silence between the noisiness of Fains and that of Bussy. The sun shines everywhere. Light mists in the morning sail in the sky like aerial messengers charged with distributing

heat, light, and refreshing breezes. The Virgin unwinds her distaff, and scatters silvery threads over the meadows, where herds of brown cows are peacefully feeding. The air is as clear as crystal. The people can be heard calling to each other from one hillside to another. Laughter and coarse jokes burst from behind every vine with reddening leaves. The vineyards blaze in the sunshine, while a transparent haze hovers over the moist furrows of the ploughed fields.

What a delight it is for the little folk to awaken in the early dawn, to dress in haste, and start out with the grown-up vintagers, both men and women! These last have been hired by the week for the occasion. They come in companies from the neighboring villages, dressed in short petticoats of printed calico, and loose jackets, with short veils on their heads. Each one carries with her the osier basket intended to receive the grapes as the bill-hook detaches them from the vine. For a week or two they are lodged and boarded by the proprietor, and they earn besides twenty or thirty sous a day. It is meagre pay; because, although it looks merry and easy, the work of the vintage is harder than may be imagined. From dawn till night the back is

bent under the sun or rain ; but the work is done in common ; the handling of the bill-hook is easier than that of the mattock or the sickle ; and, in fact, when it is good weather, the days of the vintage are looked upon by many of the peasants as an agreeable resting-place in the midst of the rough rustic labor.

They start out with their feet in the dew, preceded by the *bellonier*, who carries the grapes to the wine-press in a sort of large tub, called the *bellon* on the Meuse, and fastened by iron chains to the sides of the wagon. The vintagers, still half asleep, with their baskets under their arms, take their way towards the vineyard escorted by the master and the hamper-carriers. In order to wake them up, one of the men strikes up a couplet from the vintage song ; and soon all repeat in chorus the very realistic refrain of this tune, originating in a country more inclined to pleasantry than poetry : —

“Aller en vendage
Pour gagner dix sous,
Coucher sur la paille
Ramasser des poux,” etc.

As soon as they reach the place where the grapes are to be gathered, each sets quickly to

work, as the cool morning hours are the least uncomfortable for the task. The vintagers in a line go straight ahead, depriving each vine of its grapes, which they heap in their baskets. When these are full, they go and empty them into the hampers placed at certain distances, and supported by poles. As soon as a hamper is filled in turn, the hamper-carrier lifts it on his shoulders, and descends to the *bellon* stationed at the foot of the vineyard to receive the contents of the hampers. Towards noon, on the sides of all the vine-covered hills, the vintage is in full activity, and offers to the eye pictures suggesting Rubens.

Here the wagons are standing under the protection of green branches. The yokes, collars stuffed with blue wool, are hanging on the trees; the horses, placed in the shade under the oaks, are feeding or neighing, as they look through the foliage at their busy masters. A swarm of flies buzz around their brown sides. There some young girls are sitting on the shafts of a wagon, and a few feet away is standing a group of boys. Questions and witty repartees are interchanged, mingled with the peasant's hearty, wholesome laughter. A boy in drilling trousers is standing on the ladder

leaning against a wagon, and bending over is pouring his hamper of grapes into a tub, like a river-god pouring out his urn. Through the foliage of the oak-tree, the sun sifts spangles of light on his sunburnt face, his reddish hair, and his stalwart shoulders. Up above in the vineyard flows a noisy, ceaseless animation. Everywhere a green mantle of reddish brown, which seems to emit sparks; everywhere white backs, bright-colored hats of women, backs sometimes bent, sometimes upright; in every path processions of porters loaded with hampers of fruit exhaling a strong odor of ripe grapes, and over all this dazzling light.

It is like a last intoxication of the earth, when she already feels the caress of the yellow leaves falling on her exhausted bosom. Fall is near at hand, the days are growing short. One last revelry before the deep winter's sleep! At this solemn hour of the ending season, one is filled with the frenzy of living and taking enjoyment at the thought of the end of the festival so near at hand. The horse is there at the door, "saddled, bridled, ready to go," as the song says, and one takes a voluptuous pleasure in the sparkling wine from the stirrup-cup.



VINTAGE-TIME.

But the day is advancing, the sinking sun is purpling the clouds in the west, and bathing the hillsides in a warm hazy light. Already in the lowlands white mists are winding along the courses of the brooks. The last *bellon* is leaving, heavily loaded with grapes, crowned with branches of trees, and surrounded with little fellows holding on to the tub with their small hands, and jumping at the slightest jolt. Behind it the hamper-carrier and the vintagers, arm in arm, are singing as they return to the borough. As they approach the houses, under the dark sky pointed with bright stars, a noisy bustle fills the *pressoirs* lighted with swinging lanterns. Here and there a carriage-gate, with both doors open, discloses the interior of the *pressoir*, with wooden posts supporting the branching framework of the roof, and in the dim light the round bellies of the enormous tubs, the massive structure of the press all dripping with must, around which the men are noisily bustling. Above the roofs the cool wind brings snatches of tunes, poured loudly from the full chests of vintage men and women. Above, near the *Place de la Fontaine*, they are singing roundelay, the sharp sopranos of the women beginning the couplet: —

“Sheltered by a little grove
Sleeps the maiden fair,
As three courtiers of the king
Chance to pass by there.”

And the men’s voices in chorus with the women’s
noisily taking up the refrain : —

“Do people ever marry
When they are young ? Yes, Yes.”

The smell of sweet wine is exhaled from the presses, from the air-holes in the cellars, from the gutters in the streets. The farther one penetrates into the heart of the village, the more this noisy gayety increases. Lights tremble in the windows ; from one wine-press to another great lanterns heavily swinging seem to swagger as though they were drunk ; long strings of vintage women, with bursts of laughter, come down through the streets like a galloping troop of runaway horses. The whole village seems overcome by the rising fumes of the new wine.

In each vineyard proprietor’s large kitchen, the supper for the vintagers is smoking on the long table, lighted with shrinking candles ; it is a simple supper, but rich and abundant. It is generally composed of a greasy, savory cabbage soup, dishes

of potatoes flanked with a breast of mutton and salt pork, and a square of that cheese from Marolles, the ammoniacal odor of which takes hold of the nostrils. All this is washed down with pale wine of their own production. The vintagers, men and women, are people provided with good teeth, and are not in the least delicate, and they do justice to this repast. They eat ravenously, and drink likewise. The weak wine of the country refreshes them, and strengthens their limbs. As soon as they are full, all these fellows, from twenty to thirty years old, all the sprightly, robust, buxom lasses, have but one desire,—to dance; and this desire the proprietor always satisfies. They go to some barn dimly lighted by scattered lanterns, sometimes even in the yard or the street, and the whole band begin to dance round dances, and to waltz with mad impetuosity. Often the proprietors and their whole families take part in these hops, which sometimes degenerate into revels. During the vintage season all ranks are confounded, all prudery is forgotten.

I knew a proprietor, an old country gentleman, who did not blush to be fiddler himself for his vintagers. Perched astride a chair, he would shoulder his violin, and call out in a jolly voice to

the dancers, "First four forward!" He would scrape his fiddle with mad energy, never stopping except to shout to the vintage women in their calico skirts and jackets, as they skipped briskly over the dusty flags of the wine-press. "Ladies' chain!" he would cry in his chorister-like voice; "keep time, for gracious sake! Jacquot, don't look so much like a hen walking among the cucumbers! And you, Brunille, dance, sweetheart, without stepping on your neighbors' feet. It's not everything to have elasticity in your legs, you must know how to use 'em. . . . In time, children, in time!"

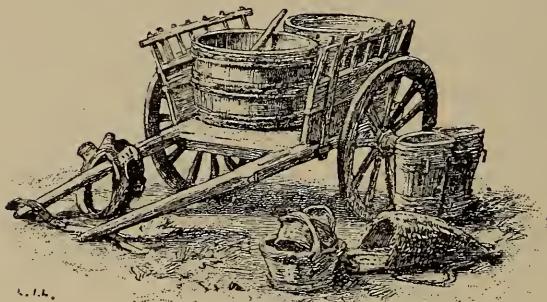
The violin played, and the girls fluttered about; the big iron shoes, as they clattered over the floor, raised clouds of dust; the couples jostled against each other; and the good-natured man would laugh enough to dislocate his jaw, scraping his instrument all the while.

This work of the vintage, interspersed with good living and noisy merriment, lasts from one to two weeks, then quiets down; the despoiled vineyards become solitary. Under the rainy wind of October, which begins to bring down the red leaves, no one is seen wandering among the vines with their overturned poles, except some poor gleaner coming with

her fingers benumbed by the sleet, to gather the half-green grapes, which have escaped the vintagers' bill-hook. With these little clusters of sour grapes, mixed with wild plums, wild pears, and elderberries, the poor people make an acid, reddish drink called *piquette*, which, on account of its color, at least has the appearance of grape wine.

The gleaners in their turn disappear; and the stripped vineyards, the shrivelled leaves of which have fallen at the touch of the first hoar frost, have no more visitors except the yellowhammers and the thrushes, those final gleaners which still succeed in finding on the vines a few scattered grapes already spoiled by the frost. The shivering birds, ruffling their feathers, utter little appealing cries as they hop over the bare vine-branches; while above, in the smoke-colored sky, long flocks of cranes and wild geese trace their strange zigzag course as they fly towards the south, making a vague, distant noise, as if to announce the approaching winter and threatening snow. Then it is good to have in the cellar a few big-bellied hogsheads full of the new vintage, the clear, warming juice of which takes the place of sunshine! They roast chestnuts under the ashes; and while outside in the

dark streets the wind is moaning and the snow flying, friends grouped around the blazing fire smack their lips as they sip the wine from the last vintage, and, clinking their glasses, drink to the prosperity of future seasons.

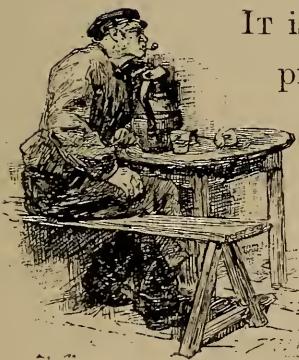




XII.

THE WINE.

IT is not the pedestrian language of prose that this chapter requires, but the winged, musical rhythm of verse, — a verse as colored and powerful as the generous, cordial liquor which escapes from the crushed grapes. It should express all the intoxication of the vintage season, — the low sound of the fermenting tub, the bubbling of the foamy must, the groaning press, the tartness and



bouquet or the new wine. This would be an occasion for singing like the poet Keats: —

“O, for a draught of vintage ! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Danee, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth !
O, for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushing Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
And purple-stainèd mouth.”

The Greeks were a fortunate people, with their wonderful allegories, — their young god Bacchus crowned with vine-leaves, their staggering Silenus, their Bacchantes crushing ripe grapes on their bare breasts and brandishing the engarlanded thyrsus, — to be able to give a thrilling picture of the tumultuous mysteries of fermentation in the vintage-tub, the transition from the grape to an intoxicating liquid of a golden or purple hue !

Out of respect for the noble wine, son of the grape, I shall not here enter into the technical details of the art of wine-making. Every one knows that any sugary liquid brought in contact with a ferment, under certain conditions of temperature, undergoes a reaction designated by the name of alcoholic fermentation. The berries of the grape

hold both the sugar and the ferment which should give rise to fermentation; but this fermentation cannot be produced until after the skin has been broken, and the juice brought in contact with the air. That is why the grapes are crushed by pressing them in wooden tubs at a temperature of eighteen degrees C. The skins of the grape and all the solid matter which the juice contains are removed by setting carbonic acid free, and form on the surface of the tub what is called the *hat of the vintage*. The wine once extracted is still very sweet, and has the name of must; enclosed in casks it undergoes a second slow fermentation, which leads to the point of preservation, and renders it fit for drinking. The crushed grapes are then submitted to the action of the press, in order to squeeze out all the winy juice, which they still hold in suspension. Such are substantially the different stages of wine-making: but these vulgar scientific details say nothing to the imagination; they do not give the dignified, familiar character of the squeezing and pressing.

I prefer to describe to you the mysterious and picturesque spectacle presented by the large *pressoirs* where this last act of the rustic poem of the vintage is played. The work is done in a dim

light and often in the night. Under the dark rafters of the *pressoir*, faintly lighted by lanterns hanging from the beams, can be seen the figures of men entirely naked as they tread the grapes in the tub. A low humming sound comes from the fermentation, a warm intoxicating odor is exhaled from the crushed grapes; while the sweet wine spurts with a purple coloring into the copper basins, and the picturesque framework of the press stands out in the half-light. Bare to their waists, the pressers push with rude noise the capstan which works the enormous screw of the press. Under their efforts the machine groans, and the sweet wine streams out with a cool sound. Porters pour the must into the deep wooden vessels, which we call at home *tandelins*, and carry the new wine on their backs into the cellars. Where I live these cellars are monumental. As the town is situated on a height, there are several stories of them, one above another, and the carrying the wine down into these catacombs has a strange religious character. The flowing of the liquid into the casks there awakens sonorous echoes, and it seems as if one could hear the soul of the wine sing.

The soul of the wine is its *bouquet*, its subtle



THE WINE-PRESS.

perfume; its delicate flavor varying infinitely according to the plants, the soil, and the climate. The least change in the composition of the soil is able to modify or suppress the bouquet, to change a fragrant wine to one that is flat and ordinary. It was on this account that formerly the Dukes of Lorraine forbade manuring the vineyards throughout the dukedom under penalty of a heavy fine. Manuring increases the quantity of the crop, but it weakens the quality. It changes the nature of the light, pebbly, sandy soil which gives to certain wines their delicate, volatile flavor. Under extensive manuring, the variety is lost, the plant degenerates, and the soul of the wine materializes.

O ye wines of France, with your diversified and exquisite bouquet, like the charming, varied landscapes of our provinces, it would take almost a Homeric enumeration to name you all, and praise you according to your merits and qualities!

First,—and here you must make a very low bow,—here is the king of wines, the generous, crimson Burgundy. Its noble vines grow on the sides of the hills so justly called the *Côte d'Or*; there they are warmed by a beneficent sunshine, never spoken of in the country otherwise than as *Bourguignon*. It

is, as they say down there, a wine to kneel down before. Warm, clear, and fragrant, whether it is called Pomard or Corton, whether it comes from Nuits or from Beaune, whether it originates in the aristocratic vineyards of Vougeot or Chambertain, it warms the heart, makes merry, and illumines the brain like sunshine. It brings laughter and eloquence to men's lips. Its liquid makes a generous, joyful vigor flow in the blood of the Burgundians. As soon as one sets his foot in the ducal province, one feels that he is in a gay atmosphere, favorable to the expansion of the heart. The men there have ruddy complexions, open countenances, rich voices, and a hearty laugh; the women have a bright, lively look in their eyes, like the Burgundian liquid, and on their lips a touch of the crimson of this royal wine.

On the other side of the mountains of Châtillon, in the valley of the Marne, on the lovely hills, which from Épernay to Château-Thierry are reflected in the winding waters of the river, there is another noble growth, celebrated throughout the whole world, but the quality of which unfortunately has been very much deteriorated by industrial speculation and deplorable imitations. It is the golden

or rosy champagne, always sparkling, always effervescent, and crowning the glass with its pearly foam. Its noisy, intoxicating influence brings pretty smiles and sparkling brilliancy to women's lips and eyes; but the animation caused by it is of short duration, and is often followed by a melancholy torpor. It is a wine the charm of which is all on the outside; it has more show than body, more foam than strength. To know it well, and to give all the justice due to it, it must be drunk at the house of some proprietor of the country, where it is preserved pure from all mixture, and where it has truly kept the flavor and delicacy of its native soil. Elsewhere, and especially in restaurants, it is for the most part, as Mürger said, nothing but "epileptic cocoa."

Let us bow as we pass by the honest, agreeable wines of le Beaujolais and le Mâconnais, the rather flat wines of l'Orléanais, and let us come to that opulent province in the centre of France, la Touraine, rich in fertile landscapes, in rivers abounding with fish, in delicious fruits, in sunny hillsides. These wines are less renowned than champagne and Burgundy; but they have, nevertheless, a rare, delicate bouquet. There sleep, in cellars hollowed out of the tufa, the sparkling Vouvray with its odor of

violets, the warm, fragrant Bourgeuil, and the Chinon, which smells like raspberries; a little farther on, going down the Loire, are found those diabolical wines from Anjou, which break the bottles, and also break people's heads.

If we pass by Poitou and Angoumois, we reach the country of tonic wines and cordials, which are rather bitter, but always improve with age, and the generous invigorating qualities of which have given them the name of *wines for the sick*. Here is Bordelais with its innumerable rich wine-vaults where the noble growths of Château-Larose, Château-Yquem, Sauterne, Château-Margaux, and so many other illustrious houses, are stored. Before the invasion of the phylloxera, all this beautiful country of France was the exquisite, varied wine-cellars of the whole world. From the Pyrenees to the Alps, the entire coast of the Mediterranean was crowned with vineyards, and the sunshine of the south there ripened wines of every kind,—the light, delicious wines from Jurançon; sweet wines from Rancio, Banyuls, Frontignan and Lunel; coarse wines from Béziers, and white wine from Limoux; strong, sparkling from the banks of the Rhône.

Going towards the east the winy sap is not ex-

hausted. Besides the wines from le Lyonnais, the pretty wines of Savoy smile in the glasses; and below, in the Jura, the red Arbois sparkles like champagne. Higher up on the hills, which are not ours, but where French hearts are always beating, ripen vines with generous juices, and appetizing, fragrant grapes. Hail to the wines of Alsace and Moselle, the red wines of Pange, white wines and strong wines of Rikewihr! But evil days have come; in melancholy silence, before drinking, our brothers from Alsace and Lorraine touch their glasses. But if mouths are silent, eyes speak, hearts understand, and each one mentally drinks a toast to the old country.

Thus the abundant wines of France fill our cellars, and make a little of the virtues and spirit of each of our provinces flow into our glasses.

I have kept you for the last, red wine of my own country, wine from the hillsides of Barrois, a modest growth, yet having your noble qualities as well as many others! You resemble those great men from the provinces, who become obscure as soon as they have crossed the limits of their own district. You are only drunk and appreciated in your own country; and, besides, you do not bear

transportation. A light, savory, currant-colored wine, you spoil with age, and take on the shades of onion-peel. You have an agreeable taste of the soil, which all the drinkers of the growth love ; and, humble as you are, you have known days of glory. At the time when Mary Stuart came to visit her relatives, the Dukes of Bar, you were served at the ducal table ; and the young queen moistened her beautiful red lips with your bright liquid, while a chorus sang verses composed by Ronsard for the occasion : —

“I all things do embrace, all things do nourish ;
My virtue makes all things to flourish ;
All things I bind, my hands hold everything.
And since o'er all things I have power,
I bade expand this perfect flower,
To rule the world this youthful king.”

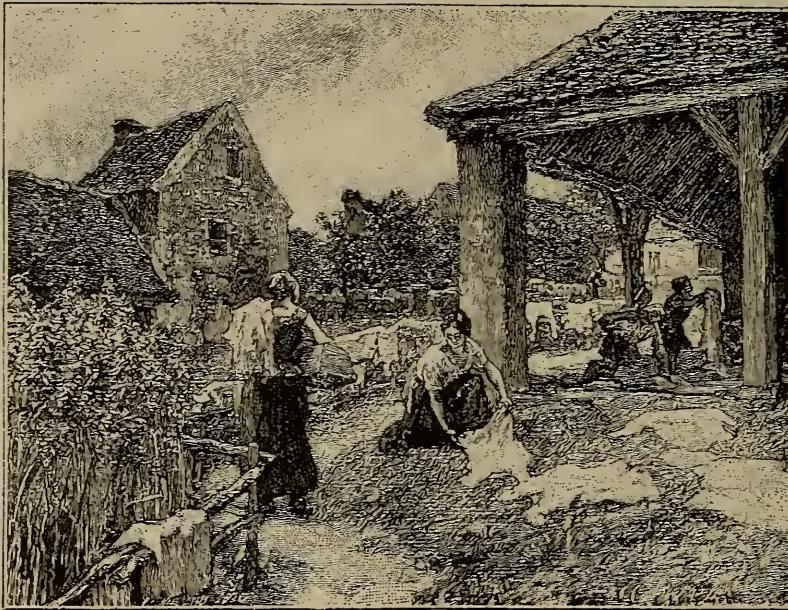
It is also related that you were poured out for the cardinals at the Council of Trent, and that they, suddenly inspired by the Holy Spirit, all with one accord declared the wine of Bar to be the best in all Christendom.

Since then you have somewhat degenerated, or is it possible that our palates have become more fastidious ? The old jet-black grape-vines have

been replaced by those more common and more productive. Thus the course of events goes on, and thus everything becomes common. Nevertheless, you prosper and delight those who drink in our valley. Your nutritious vines still carpet all our hills in Ornain ; and it is a sweet sight to the eyes, when, triumphing over the frosts of May, the branches have grown and covered the round shoulders of our hills with their phosphorescent verdure.

That is why, light wine of my country, it is you to-day that I wish to pour into my glass, and raising it high in the air, in order that the summer sunshine may make it sparkle like rubies, with you I wish to offer a toast and drink — to the wines of France !





THE HEMP.

THE hemp, its finger-like leaves extending—

 The hemp is now in bloom. I' the breeze,

 The pollen, like a smoke ascending.

 Above the verdant stalks one sees,

 And as its perfume sweeps the plain,

 Its breath, like wine, excites the swain.

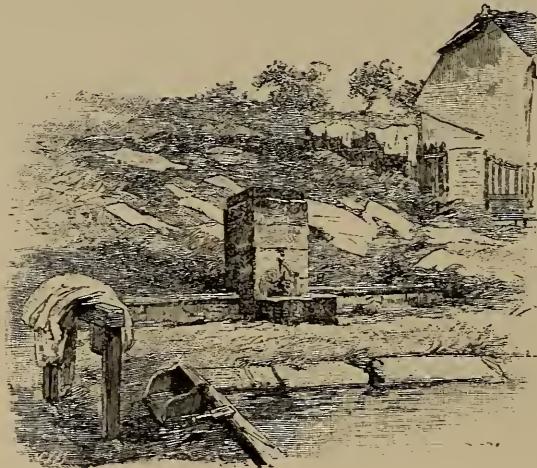
The hemp is ripe. — Both night and day
Deep in the stagnant pool they ret it
Until its fibres fall away ;
Thus ready for the wheel they get it !
More swiftly than the darting merle,
Turn spinning-wheel — whirl, distaff, whirl.

So like a chain, soft, yet defending,
O little threads of flax, you bind —
From their commencement to their ending —
The lives of all the human kind.
From the cradle — where the infant prattles,
To the tomb — when he has fought his battles.

You make the swaddling clothes complete,
Which in the morning dew they whiten,
The blue smock of the farmer neat,
The trousseau of the bride, to brighten
With it and what her heart may bring
The dwelling of her lord and king !

You make the screen for fireside duty
When the long winter eves are due, —
The sail which breezes swell in beauty
Against the ocean's boundless blue, —
The nomad tent that gleams so white,
When rising stars proclaim the night.

O delicate threads of flax joined fast,
When Death's strange mystery comes unbidden,
You make the winding-sheet at last,
Wherein our bodies wrapt are hidden
Beneath the ground, to rise again.
In poppies red, in hemp, in grain !





XIII.

THE HEMP-FIELD.



THE textile plant bearing the name of *hemp* is, I think, quite familiar to every one, so that it is almost useless for me to describe it. Let us say only that it belongs to the family of *urticaceæ*, and that it is first cousin to the nettle. The plants of this family are dioic, that is to say, the male and female flowers grow on separate stems; they have a thready stalk, and rough, velvety leaves. Those of the hemp are palmate — separated into five

sharp lobes, nearly like those of the horse-chestnut tree. The plants rise very straight to quite a height from the ground; they are higher than a man's waist. The male flowers, disposed in loose bunches, are greenish in color. The female flowers, after fecundation, give rise to an oleaginous grain very much liked by birds — hemp-seed. The fields where hemp grows are called *chenevières*.

Formerly there was no village or hamlet near a stream of water, brook, river, or pond, which did not profit by this proximity to cultivate hemp. Every peasant's house had its hemp-field, small or large, according to the needs of the family. This plantation occupied a square of good land, very near the principal building, at the end of the kitchen-garden, and not far from the meadow. The hemp-field gave the finishing touch to these rustic habitations; its dark verdure harmonized with the hives of the apiary, the twining beans with their red blossoms, and the tangle of bushed pease. Each household took pride in growing on its own land enough hemp to supply the household linen; the women themselves spun the product of the crop, and the shirts for the whole family were woven with the threads from the

plant which the people of the house had grown. But now that the multiplication of large shops and the facility of intercommunication allow the inhabitants of the smallest village to provide themselves at a low cost with the manufactured products of France and other countries, the peasant prefers to buy his linen cheap in the town, and to put under more productive cultivation his best lands, where he had been at a great expense to raise produce now become useless.

Hemp-fields prosper only in rich, deep soil, principally alluvial ground, which the proximity of water keeps in a healthful state of moisture, and where the spring freshets serve as a natural dressing. In this black soil, rich in vegetable mould, the hemp is sown very thick in April, when a beneficial rain has soaked the earth; the seed is buried with the help of the harrow.

Hemp has many enemies, which the cultivator has to guard against. First, the pigeons at the time of sowing. When they light upon a freshly sown hemp-field, they do not hesitate to dig up the seed just beginning to sprout, and to gorge themselves with it, caring naught about the fate of the future harvest; then come flocks of sparrows, very

fond of the growing shoots of the hemp. The most ingenious scarecrows are useless defences against these bold plunderers. The sparrows actually scorn manikins stuffed with hay, and dressed in old coats, with straw hats on their heads, innocently stationed on the border of the hemp-field. Their instinct quickly tells them that they have nothing to do with a human creature of flesh and bones; and they eagerly pounce upon the young shoots, without caring for these scarecrows, vainly waving their loose arms to stop the depredations of the vagabond flock. If the peasant seriously cares to protect his crop, he is obliged to mount guard himself over his hemp-field.

However, watered by the rains of May, and warmed by the June sunshine, the hemp grows fast, and soon attains a size which saves it from the birds' beaks. Close, thick, and abundant, the hemp waves in the field; and it is a pleasure to see its fine stalks, with their decorative leaves, spread their dark green mantle in the midst of the silvery gray rye and the more delicate green of the wheat.

How many times, at the end of Lake Annecy, in the flat, turf'y land extending to the first breast-

like slopes of the mountain, I have stopped of a cool August morning to look at the great squares of hemp-fields, lifting their dark verdure against the sapphire blue waters of the lake! The sky, cloudy and smoky in the direction of the hills, would grow bright above Annecy. As the sun came out of the clouds, the sides of Semnoz took on the colors of dawn,—cool saffron, pink, and lilac hues, streaked with light bluish shades. The silvery clouds rolled along down the wooded slopes, after crossing the pass of Entrevernes; behind, Doussard and its forest were still sleeping in semi-obscurity; white mists danced about the summits of Charbon Mountain, while around me the whole plain was already bathed in a golden light; and the hemp-fields were waving right and left, spreading abroad their pungent, penetrating odor.

This strongly aromatic, intoxicating odor is the indication of the beginning of blossom-time in the hemp-field. The pollen of the male flowers is detached from the stamens by the least breath of wind, and hovers like a gray cloud above the masses of green stalks. Fecundation is taking place. They say then that the hemp-field is smoking, and it is the time chosen to pull up the male

hemp. It has accomplished its function, its leaves turn yellow and hang down upon the stem; it is good for nothing more but retting.

They leave the female hemp two weeks longer, a sufficient time to ripen the grain, which is carefully gathered. Hemp-seed is used to feed poultry; besides, an oil is made from it, which is used in commerce. So there is a double advantage in waiting two weeks before removing the rest of the hemp, and the peasant is not a man to neglect this little profit. Nevertheless, some farmers claim that what is gained from the grain is lost in the quality of the textile matter, and in that way one offsets the other.

When the hemp has been pulled up, it is made into little bundles, tied at the top and bottom with the abortive stems; as the tying is completed, a man with a hatchet cuts off the roots from these bundles on a wooden horse. Then the hemp-stalks, made into sheaves, are fastened to stakes arranged in rows in the field, and are left for the sun and wind to accomplish naturally the work of drying the leaves and grain. When it is all properly dried, cloths or old staved-in casks are brought out; women take the bundles of



GATHERING HEMP.

hemp one by one and shake them, heads down, in order to make all the hemp-seed fall into the receptacle. When the grain has been entirely gathered, the hemp is ready for successive operations, which transform its dried stems into thread and linen.

It is wonderful to think of all that human industry can get from this common plant, so plebeian in appearance, and so frail! In how many different ways will the fibres of these stems produced by a single hemp-seed be utilized! Hemp takes part in all the acts of life like an indispensable element. It serves to furnish the cable of ships, the soldier's tent, nets for the huntsman and fisherman, the peasant's blue blouse, the coarsest shirt, as well as the most precious lace. The cloth in which man is born, sleeps, is married, and dies, has been woven from the fibres of the hemp. The rope of safety thrown to the unfortunate man who is drowning, and the rope for the man to be hanged, have perhaps been made from the stalks produced in the same hemp-field. And when the wrought linen is of no more use, when it is nothing but a common rag thrown into the waste-basket, it is still utilized; and from it comes the

firm white paper on which books are printed, and by aid of which thought circulates throughout the world, and is transmitted from age to age.

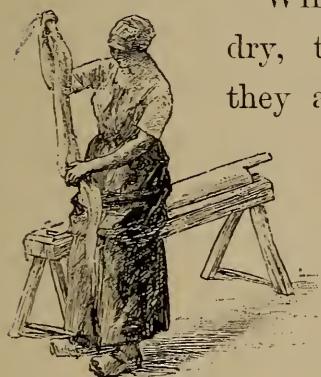
Like the grain of wheat and the grape, the hemp-seed is one of the simplest, and one of the most fertile, elements of human activity.





XIV.

THE RETTING AND PEELING.



WHEN the stems of the hemp are dry, they are retted; that is to say, they are left in water long enough to dissolve, by means of fermentation, the mucilaginous matter which holds the fibres together, and forms the structure of the stem. This disintegration sets free putrid emanations, corrupting the water in which the hemp is soaking, so, as a measure of healthful-

ness, it is forbidden to carry on the operation of retting in rivers and brooks. Ordinarily retting is done in pools of standing water, called *routoirs*. These pools are square holes, three feet deep, made in meadows bordering some water-course, so that the hole is filled by means of infiltration from the neighboring river or brook. The hemp is kept at the bottom of the pool by means of large stones, and remains there until the fibres are entirely disintegrated.

At my home, these open holes in the ground, half concealed by the meadow grass, were the most treacherous and the most dangerous traps imaginable. For myself, I owe to them one of the most disagreeable recollections of my childhood. I was eight years old, and was wandering through the meadows, while my grandparents were gravely talking on a seat by a neighboring path. The meadow was full of daisies and other flowers, and I was gathering a bouquet in the long grass.

Suddenly the earth gave way; and I disappeared as if I had fallen into a trap, at the bottom of a miry pool. The water rose above my head, big stones rolled under my feet, my ears hummed, and a series of terrifying thoughts passed through

my brain with electrical rapidity. Fortunately the hole was not very deep. I clung to the grass on the edge, my head emerged, and I screamed like a peacock, and this brought my family in great haste. They fished me out—in what condition? Dripping, muddy, covered with long, greenish filaments, exhaling a nauseating odor. To crown the misfortune, we were a good half-league from the house, and I was obliged to get there as best I could. My trousers went flip-flap at every step, streams of water oozed from my shoes, and I felt all shrivelled and shrunk in my soaked garments.

I began to shiver with cold, and into the bargain was obliged to submit on the way to a sermon on the subject of my carelessness and heedlessness; and this I felt was quite inopportune. At last we reached home. I was undressed, sponged, and put to bed; and I still remember—soft as a wadded wrapper—the delicious feeling of the dry linen, the well-warmed bed, and the good cup of hot, fragrant *tilleul*, after drinking which I fell asleep with the gurgling waters still sounding in my ears.

The hemp comes out of the pool in somewhat the same pitiful condition in which I was rescued from it, but it has not come to the end of its

troubles. After immersion in this stagnant water, it is again dried in the sun, and then submitted to the double operation of peeling and carding.

The apparatus used in peeling consists of a wooden horse, on the back of which moves a lever, also of wood, which is raised and lowered with the hand, and by means of which the hemp stalks are pounded. The skin is thus removed from the fibres, and leaves all the textile part bare. What is left after the stem is peeled is called *chènevotes* or *chanvres-nus*, and the peasants use them for lamp-lighters. Taken together in a mass, these *chènevotes* make a clear, bright blaze, which is of short duration, but pleases the children when they gather in winter around the fire in the high country fireplaces.

The wooden horse is not always used to peel hemp; and in many country places the work of stripping, left to the women, is done by hand. In Savoy I have often met peasant women walking with their aprons filled with hemp-stalks: as they went along, they would take a stalk, and peel it between their rough, callous fingers; and I have watched them for a long time as they walked in the broad sunshine, with wide straw hats on their



HEMP-STRIPPING.

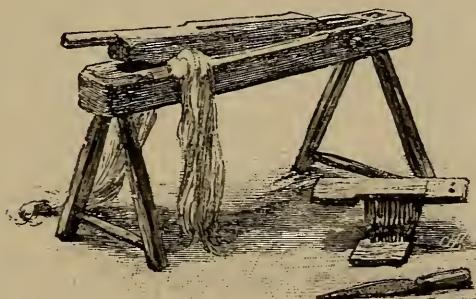
heads, mechanically stripping the hemp-stalks, the light skin of which they let fly away in the wind.

Where I live, this task is reserved for winter evenings. When they meet in the *veilloir* in the evening, the women peel the hemp by hand ; the *débris* serves to feed the fire, which burns gayly, and in its light the old peelers move about, with attitudes suggestive of Villon's verses :—

“ Assises bas, à Cropetons,
À petit feu de chènevotes.”¹

After the peeling, the threads of hemp are collected in bundles, and carefully carded. They are fine, flexible, and yellow, like woman's hair; and the spinners fasten them with a colored ribbon to their distaffs.

¹ Crouching low beside the fire,
Flickering in the hempen-boon.





X V.

THE SPINNERS.



BEFORE the economic revolution brought about by the substitution of machinery for the intelligent hand of the workman, the spinning of textile materials formed one of the principal occupations for women; the distaff, the spinning wheel, and the bobbin were the symbols of domestic activity. In the works of Theocritus, there is

an idyl¹ on the *Distaff*, which cannot become too familiar: —

“ Distaff, blithely whirling distaff, azure-eyed Athene’s gift
To the sex the arm and object of whose lives is household
thrift,

Seek with me the gorgeous city raised by Neilus, where a plain
Roof of pale-green rush o’erarches Aphrodite’s hallowed fane.
Thither ask I Zeus to waft me, fain to see my old friend’s face,
Nicias, o’er whose birth presided every passion-breathing Grace;
Fain to meet his answering welcome; and anon deposit thee
In his lady’s hands, thou marvel of laborious ivory.

Many a manly robe ye’ll fashion, and much floating maiden’s gear,
Nay, should e’er the fleecy mothers twice within the self-
same year

Yield their wool in yonder pasture, Theugenis of the dainty feet
Would perform the double labor; matron’s cares to her are
sweet.

To an idler or a trifler I had verily been loath
To resign thee, O my distaff, for the same land bred us both;
In the land Corinthian Archias built aforetime, thou hadst birth,
In our island’s core and marrow, whence have sprung the
kings of earth:

To the home I own transfer thee of a man who knows full well
Every craft whereby men’s bodies dire diseases may repel: —

¹ Theocritus, Idyl xxviii., translated by C. S. Calverley.

Mr. Andrew Lang says, “This little piece of Æolic verse accompanied the present of a distaff, which Theocritus brought from Syracuse to Theugenis, the wife of his friend Nicias, the physician of Miletus. On the margin of a translation by Longpierre (the famous book-collector), Louis XIV. wrote that this idyl is a model of honorable gallantry.”

There to live in sweet Miletus, Lady of the Distaff she
Shall be named, and oft reminded of her poet-friend by thee;
Men shall look on thee and murmur to each other, ‘Lo ! how
small

Was the gift, and yet how precious ! Friendship’s gifts are
priceless all.’”

Formerly, in almost all families, there was a spinning-wheel to be found in the mistress’s room. Among the people of the present time who have reached the fifties, who does not remember having seen, on the top of some antique cupboard, one of the pretty spinning-wheels of the eighteenth century, of pear-wood or ebony, with its light, gracefully turned legs, its wheel inlaid with ivory, its cup, its high bobbin, and distaff tied with ribbons ? This piece of family furniture suggested a succession of calm, peaceful thoughts ; it called up a whole life of laborious solitude, simple and patriarchal. It brought to mind the grandmother dressed in the fashion of the olden time, sitting near the window, with her distaff in her belt, moving the pedal of the spinning-wheel with her foot, and spinning in the high-studded room of some quiet provincial house.

The distaff still holds a place of honor to-day in the country. The housewife in the evening,



THE SPINNERS.

the shepherdess while tending her flocks in the fields, spin skeins intended to make sheets and shirts for the family. They spin with the wheel and with the spindle. The wheel is used for sedentary tasks; the spindle, on the contrary, allows the spinner to go about in the open air, through the fields, while busy at work. It is the simplest and most ancient method of spinning. The spinner holds in one hand the rock to which the bunch of hemp is fastened; with the other hand she pulls and twists the tow, which she moistens with her saliva, and which, when once transformed into thread, winds around the spindle, to which she gives a rotating motion.

In the more complicated system of the wheel, the pedal, moved by the foot, turns the wheel and sets the bobbin in motion, which advantageously takes the place of the distaff. A pewter cup filled with water is fastened to one of the posts, and serves to moisten the thread. The spinner pulls from her distaff a pinch of tow, picks it apart, draws it out, twists it, and fixes it on the bobbin, which turns with a low humming, and which the mechanism of the pedal and the wheel permits not a moment of rest.

The poet Max Buchon, in his collection of *Popular Songs of the Franche-Comté*, quotes a curious song relating to the operation of spinning. The exact words have escaped my memory; but this is the sense of the symbolical ballad, in which the singer associates all ages of life successively with the task of the spinner as she draws the tow from her distaff:—

“ Tie a red ribbon on thy distaff, and merrily spin the linen
to make a cool skirt to wear to the ball with thy lover.

Tie a white ribbon on thy distaff, and joyfully spin the white
linen to make the sheets for thy wedding-bed.

Tie a blue ribbon on thy distaff, and gently spin the fine linen
to make the swaddling-clothes for thy first-born.”

The song goes on in this way to the last verse, the words of which I have retained:—

“ A ta quenouille, un ruban noir!
File, sans trop le laisser voir,
Le linceul dont, quand tu mourras,
L’un de nous t’enveloppera. . . . ”¹

¹ Upon thy distaff a ribbon black,
Spin! but do not let too much be seen
Of the winding-sheet, which, when thou art dead,
One of us will swathe thee in!

This popular poetry is pretty — almost too pretty. Its over-careful and symmetrical dress makes me fear that a city poet has remodelled it. I suspect Max Buchon of having many times touched up the primitive, cracked canvas.

When the bobbin is completely filled with thread, it is reeled off and made into skeins by means of an instrument called the *giroinde*. The *giroinde*! This is still another piece of domestic furniture which has almost entirely disappeared, and used to have a charming elegance. Possibly you may have come across it in the long unused room of one of your grandmothers. Possibly you have at least seen it in one of Chardin's pictures. It is a sort of reel, mounted on a foot, and having the shape of a wheel, each spoke of which is a wooden branch terminating in a vertical pin. The hand is sufficient to set this wheel in motion; and the thread from the bobbin rolls around the circular pins in such a way as to make the skein, or *chaine*, which is finally taken to the linen weavers.

In the country the work of spinning with the wheel is done almost entirely in the winter-time, during the long evenings spent in company together. These meetings take place in some large

kitchen, lighted by candles supplied in turn by each of the company. The women bring their wheels with them, and also a fagot of vine-branches intended to feed the fire in the deep fireplace. The men are often present at these evening reunions; and when they are in a generous humor they offer an entertainment consisting of warm wine, nuts, and apples dried in the oven. While the wheels are turning, and filling the kitchen with their monotonous humming, tongues are set going, and move as fast as the wheels. All the country news is repeated here and commented upon,—births, deaths, and marriages, especially marriages. While the thread is winding around the bobbins, all the village love affairs are reeled off, and God knows whether the skein is tangled! It is here, too, that the boys come to flirt with the girls, and here that the best stories are told, fairy stories or ghost stories, adventures of sailors or soldiers. The spinners' *répertoire* is inexhaustible. Here is one of these tales, originating in the spinners' imagination, and entirely circumstantial, since the hemp and the spinning-wheel play the principal parts:—

“There was once a peasant girl as beautiful as the day, but as lazy as she was beautiful. As she

was very vain of her beauty, she spent all her time combing her hair, brushing it, and looking at herself in the glass. Never, never in the world did she touch a spinning-wheel. She had beautiful hands, and was afraid of spoiling them by twisting the thread. She left this work to her mother and sisters, who, being less pretty than herself, were less spoiled and more industrious. But one day it was rumored abroad that the king's son was going through the country in search of a wife who must be both a lovely companion and a good house-keeper. He had already looked at all the girls in the neighboring country without finding any one to satisfy him. When at last he reached the parish where the idle beauty dwelt, she happened to be for the time alone in the house, her sisters were in the field with their father and mother, and, as usual, she was guarding the house without doing a stroke of work with her ten fingers.

"As soon as she knew of the arrival of the king's son, and that he would pass her door, she took her place in the doorway, with her hair carefully dressed, and charmingly attired; then, in order to present a good appearance, she seated herself before her sister's spinning-wheel, the distaff of which was

full and the bobbin already plump with thread, and pretended to spin. The king's son, followed by his courtiers, stopped before the young spinner, and was filled with admiration to see a girl so pretty and at the same time so industrious.

“‘Are you the one who has spun all this hemp?’ he asked the young girl.

“‘Yes, Prince,’ she replied audaciously, giving the king's son a look which pierced him to the heart.

“‘Then you love to spin very much, do you not?’

“‘Passionately,’ she continued, without hesitation.

“‘Ah! well,’ he added, enchanted, ‘come with me, you shall be attached to the court, and there you shall be able to satisfy your taste at leisure.’

“So he took the beautiful girl to his court, put her in a castle, all the rooms of which were full of fine hemp, shining like gold, and he said to her: —

“‘Since you are so fond of spinning, you shall remain here for a year; and if at the end of the year you have spun all the hemp here, I will take you for my wife, and you shall be queen of my kingdom.’

"The beautiful girl bowed without opening her lips, very much embarrassed and very much troubled, as you may imagine. Food was brought to her in the castle, but she could not go out until all the hemp had been spun. One day, as she was mourning by the window, she saw passing along the road three very ugly, very humpbacked old women, who said to her:—

"If you will promise to invite us to your wedding, we will spin all the hemp in this castle for you, and before the end of the year you shall marry the king's son."

"Naturally she promised as they wished. The three old women entered the castle at nightfall; she lodged them secretly in an upper room. Then they seated themselves without delay at their spinning-wheels, and worked so well that before the end of the year all the hemp was spun. The beautiful girl notified the king's son, and he was so filled with admiration that he wished to have the marriage take place in two weeks' time. When all the preparations had been made, the young girl, who was very much afraid of the three old women, told her future husband that she had three very aged relatives whom she ardently desired to have

present at her wedding. The prince was too deeply in love to refuse, and the three old women were invited to the *fête*. So they arrived, more infirm, more humpbacked, and uglier than ever: one had a long, flat thumb like a spatula; the second, a lip hanging down like that of an old dog; the third, a broad, flat foot like a battledoor. When the king's son saw them in the procession, he stood still in amazement, and asked one of them:—

“‘Why have you such a large foot?’

“‘Because,’ she replied, ‘I have worked the spinning-wheel with that foot.’

“‘And you,’ said the prince to the second one, ‘where did you get that thumb shaped like a pot-spoon?’

“‘That is from twisting the hemp in spinning.’

“‘When the prince reached the third, he uttered a cry at sight of her drooping lip:—

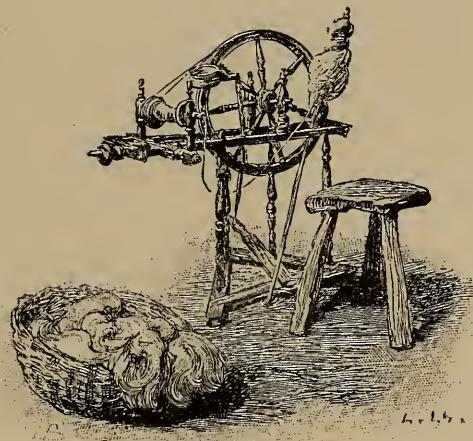
“‘Why does your lip hang down so?’

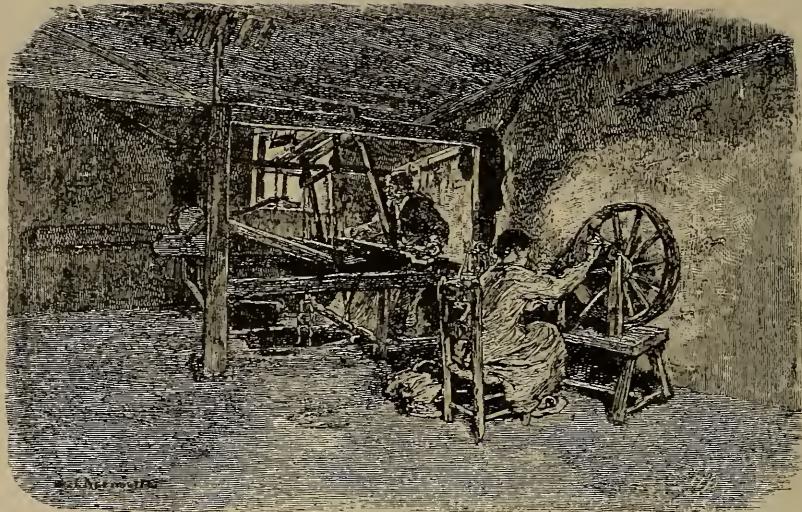
“‘That is because I have wet the hemp with my saliva while spinning,’ she replied.

“The king's son was so shocked by the consequences of spinning that he swore by all that was holy that his wife should never spin any more.

“And this is how the beautiful girl, who had

never spun at all, won a royal crown without moving her ten fingers, and was, furthermore, relieved of all fear of being obliged to turn a spinning-wheel."





XVI.

THE WEAVER.



AT the time when mechanical weaving was still unknown, weavers were plenty in the country. Poor farmers, owning only a small piece of land, united the industry of weaving to that of tilling the ground, and thus made profitable use of their days and even their evenings in the winter-time. In the dampest, darkest corner of their small dwelling, the weaver's loom lifted its massive, elemental structure. Every fortnight the man would

go to the town to get his skeins of thread, and return to the village at dusk, bent over beneath the burden. At the end of the two weeks he would carry back the pieces of woven linen, receive his pay, and return with a new lot of spun hemp.

In the manufacturing towns, certain quarters of the suburbs were entirely inhabited by families of weavers. As the operation of weaving is done better in cool places, the looms were almost always placed in cellars; and through the air-holes was heard from morning till night the rattling sound of the shuttles, and the dry, noisy panting of the battens. These cellars, where two and sometimes three looms kept up their ceaseless jarring, had a mysterious never-to-be-forgotten appearance. The floor was usually made of beaten earth; the bare, black walls were covered with nothing but cobwebs; they were reached by a stairway leading from the level of the street, and the daylight only reached them through dusty panes of greenish glass. There was no furniture, except the heavy loom which had served generations of workmen; occasionally a single picture, representing the Wandering Jew or the “Bonhomme Misère,” brightened with its crude colors the black, sweating walls.

The master of this underground place, the weaver himself, had a strange face, in harmony with the gloomy dwelling. Pale, like all beings living in darkness, with thin limbs, made crooked by working the heavy, awkward loom, he allowed his hair and beard to grow as they pleased ; and under this tangled growth his eyes sparkled with a mournful, feverish fire. The weavers had a wild appearance ; but at heart they were very honest and very good-natured, unless they were driven to extremities by the unreasonable demands of some patron. I had a long acquaintance with them in my childhood ; I passed whole hours in the cellars, attracted by the strangeness of the place and the mysterious mechanism of the loom. We always were good friends, and I have a pleasant recollection of their gentle, cordial ways.

It was about the year 1848. At that time affairs were in a bad condition ; the lack of work and the high price of bread put the weavers' patience to a severe test. Moreover, revolutionary explosions were bursting in Europe ; and socialistic doctrines, re-echoed in the provincial clubs, penetrated even to the weavers' quarters. It was the time when Henri Heine wrote for the weavers of

Silesia this wild song, in which such a terrible cry of anger and suffering breaks forth:—

“Seated before their looms, no tears in their gloomy eyes,
they sing as they grind their teeth:—

“Germany, we weave thy shroud ; we weave the threefold curse into our fabric.—We weave, we weave !

“Cursed be the false God to whom we have addressed our prayers on cold winter nights and long days of hunger. We have waited and hoped in vain ; he has betrayed us, deceived and derided us.—We weave, we weave !

“Cursed be the king, the king of the rich, whom we have implored for pity in vain. He has extorted the last farthing from our pockets, and now he has us shot down like dogs.—We weave, we weave !

“The shuttle flies, the loom creaks. We weave by day, we weave by night. Old Germany, we weave thy winding-sheet ; we weave the three-fold curse into our fabric.—We weave, we weave !”¹

The echo of these threats and this wrath, like a loud thunderclap, reached the bottom of the damp cellars where the looms were standing idle ; and

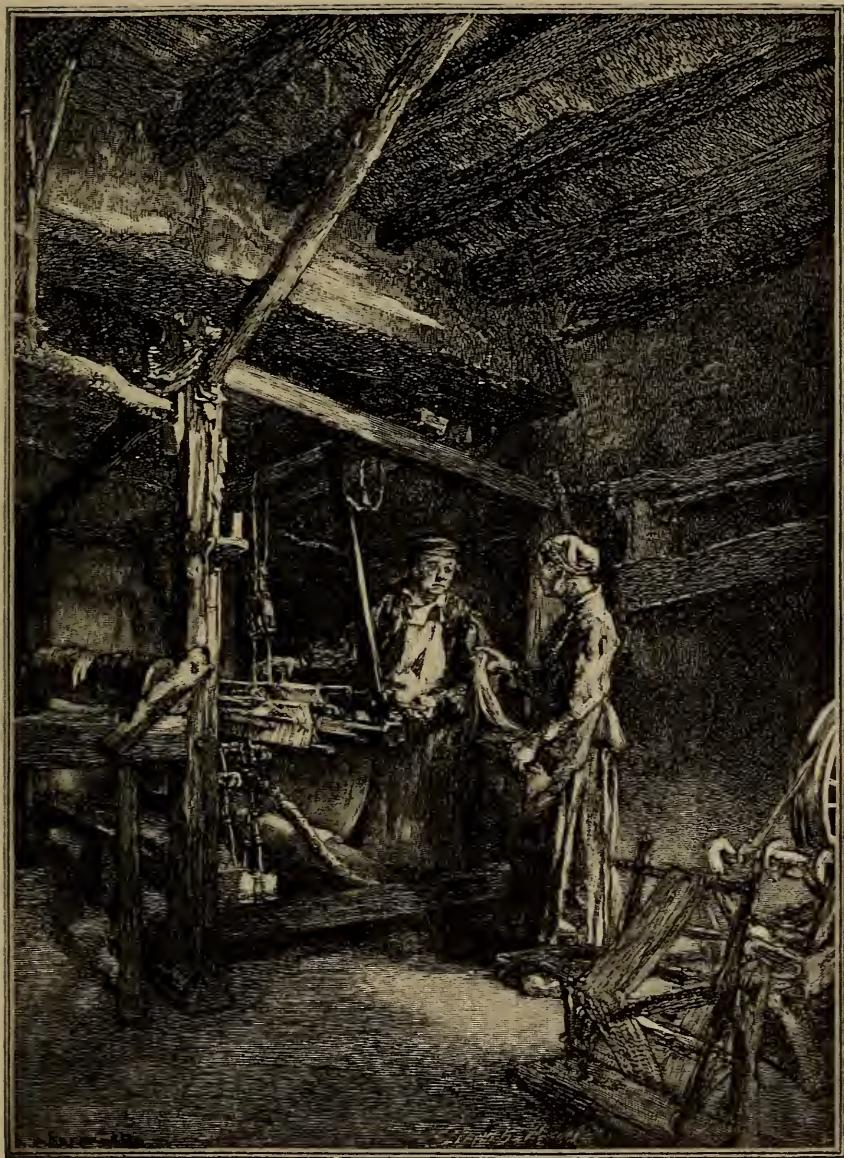
¹ Die Weber:

“Im düstern auge keine Thräne,
Sie sitzen am Webstuhl und fletschen die Zähne:
‘Deutschland, wir weben dein Leichtentuch,
Wir weben hinein den dreifachen Fluch—
Wir weben, wir weben! ’” etc. (1844).

sometimes the weavers, suddenly roused by these riotous outcries, would desert the suburbs and run to the public square, waving their thin arms and blinking their mournful eyes, ill accustomed to the broad daylight. The bourgeois in their homes would tremble, already dreaming of fire and pillage; but the energetic, fatherly advice of some sensible, intelligent administrator was sufficient to calm this superficial exasperation, and to send back my honest friends, the weavers, tamed and resigned, to their dark, chilly cellars.

Allowance must be made for this resignation, for the weaver's life is a hard one. The appearance alone of the heavy, uncouth loom, to which he is tied night and day, tells the story of this laborious life. The loom, with its clumsy, defaced beams of old oak, blackened by age and dampness, has a tragic appearance. The massive levers worked by the foot, the heavy battens moved by the hand, the warp of brass where the threads cross each other, the strident movement of the shuttle,—all this gives you the impression of some ancient slave labor. With plaintive creaking, this heavy machine,—

. . . “struggles beneath the urging hand and shakes.
You hear the ceaseless clamor that it makes,



THE WEAVER.

As still the wooden shuttle to and fro
Over the same monotonous path must go.
The weaver is the soul of the groaning loom,
And yet he is its slave by pitiless doom!
Bending above the frame,—his feet and hands
In constant motion,—he forever stands
Bound to his weary task: no hope appears.
He is like the soil-bound serf. The flying years
For him no change the changing seasons bring.
In his dark cellar come no spring.
Nor summer-time, nor autumn, and he knows
No fragrant flowering of the radiant rose;
For in those dark and gloomy vaults no flower
Could ever live to bloom its little hour.
The week for him has ne'er a Sunday rest. . . .”

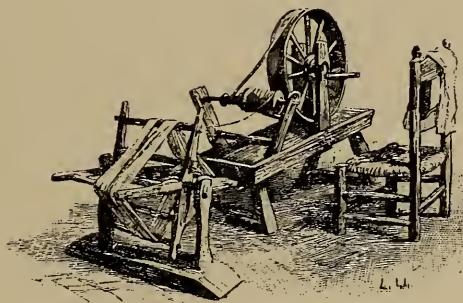
Have you ever seen, of an autumn morning, one of those large spiders called *épéires diadèmes*, spinning his web between the green branches of some vine? He ascends and descends from one stem to another, going, coming, leading his threads in such a way as to trace in the air a kind of plane polygon, with rays starting out in every direction from the centre; then, working round and round, he fastens to these well-spread rays a series of concentric threads, and ends by weaving a frail, delicate *rosace*, a masterpiece of lightness and grace. When his web is woven, he places himself in the middle, and waits for some fly to pass by, to

pay him for his trouble. Sometimes, especially when the weather is bad, the fly keeps him waiting ; and the poor spider remains for whole days lying in wait for the prey to serve as his subsistence, and to allow him to replace his web, torn by the rain or the wind. Nature has given him a hard and distressing alternative : without a web, no fly ; and without a fly, no substance indispensable to the secretion for the thread ! This spider is the living image of the weaver. He, too, must weave to live ; and if hunger makes a vacuum in his stomach, if need weakens his arms, good-by to working the loom ! The linen alone can give him bread, and without bread he has no strength to weave his linen. A horrible, vicious circle ; a horizon always the same, and always distressing !

And just as the spider weaves in all weathers his work of art, the *rosace* as marvellous as guipure lace ; just so the weaver, in pain and anguish, weaves the fine white linen in which the fortunate ones of this world are to dream lovely dreams and sleep late in the morning.

Alas ! I ought to say *used to weave* ; for the weaver working at home, in the midst of his family, hardly exists at the present time. The great mechanical

looms have killed the small local industries ; and our nephews will no longer see the original melancholy linen weaver, stirring his feet and hands, in his cellar, in order to work the heavy loom with its resounding complaint.





XVII.

THE WASHING.



HERE is another rustic operation little known except to those who have lived in the country. In Paris they wash constantly, and with the help of rapid chemical processes. They use considerable white linen, it is soiled quickly, and as they do not keep an enormous supply, it is often renewed. In the provinces, and especially in the country, it is quite different. They take pride in possessing a quantity of linen; table-cloths, sheets, shirts, pillow-cases, are piled up by the dozen in the deep, massive clothes-presses; only the body linen is given to the laun-

dress, and the rest is washed at home. So the washing assumes the importance of a solemn event. It is one of the great ceremonies of domestic life.

At my home this sacramental operation is performed twice a year, in the early spring and late in the autumn. I recall exactly the two dates, because they coincided with the Easter holidays and the September vacation. I never think of them except accompanied by gay recollections of holidays spent on the threshold of the wash-house, watching the lighting of the fire in the furnace, and the coming and going of the washerwomen. For months wood ashes had been stored up for the washing. Long before, the week had been fixed upon when the washing was to be done, and the women to wash and iron had been engaged. The lofty garrets, with their branching timbers, were filled with heaps of soiled linen, which were sorted, after having been taken out of a great chest of fir-wood, and which the servants, bending under the weight, carried to the wash-house.

The washing, like a Spanish comedy, included three days, three quite distinct acts. At first it was collected. The family linen was placed in closely pressed layers, in the great, big-bellied lye-

tub, the successive layers being wet with cold water. When the tub was full, a cloth of coarse linen, called the *cendrier*, was spread over the top, and on this cloth a thick bed of wood ashes was laid. Then it was all left to rest over night.

The next day the scalding took place. Early in the morning a special woman, skilled in the art of washing, would come to the wash-house, light fagots of vine-branches in the furnace, above which swelled the big boiler full of water, and begin, as soon as the liquid was sufficiently hot, to wet the ashes in the tub. The water, in passing slowly through the ashes, absorbed a part of the alkaline principles which they contained; and filtered by the *cendrier*, it gradually soaked into the layers of linen, and gently cleansed them. Then it flowed out through an open bung-hole in the bottom of the tub, was collected in a sort of bucket, and poured back into the boiler, where a brushwood fire kept it at an even temperature. After successive passages through the ashes and the linen, this soft, soapy wash-water took on a beautiful brown color, and exhaled a very characteristic odor of ammonia.

This leaching of the washing requires knowl-



LYE-WASHING.

edge and experience, very much appreciated by housekeepers. People are born washerwomen, just as they are born cooks. Good leachers are rare, and much sought after. The liquid must be poured over the ashes methodically, and not suddenly. The water for the leaching must be kept at a uniform temperature; and very experienced judgment is required to use the right quantity of liquid, and measure the proper intervals between each wetting. So the same laundress is kept for years in households, and she becomes almost a part of the family.

Ours had done the leaching for a quarter of a century at my grandparents' house. She was a small, middle-aged woman, quick, gossiping, stubborn, and despotic, but amiable at times; and I considered it a privilege to be allowed to bake potatoes in the ashes of her furnace. I loved to spend my time in her society, in the warm laundry, full of alkaline steam, and where the warm water was flowing with a loud gurgling.

Jules Bastien-Lepage has among his works a little picture, giving an admirable idea of the appearance of the leaching of the linen. Against the brown background of the laundry, the tub

draped with the whitish *cendrier* stands out in the penumbra; a young peasant woman, bare-headed, is bending over the cloth and examining the ashes, which she has just wet; in the background an open door shows the interior of an adjoining room. It is painted in a scale of sombre grays, browns, and blue tints, and is as beautiful as a Chardin; it is to be regretted that, at the sale of the young Lorranian master's works, the Musée du Louvre allowed this marvellous little canvas to go abroad, so that we may never see it again.

Leaching-day is followed by washing-day. The washerwomen, with baskets on their backs, come to take the scalded linen, and carry it to the wash-house, where it is soaped, pounded with bats, soaked in running water, rinsed, and wrung. These washerwomen are rough, strong women, with brawny red arms, harsh voices, and brazen faces. They are very bold and loose-tongued. When I was a child, they received a franc a day, coffee with milk, and the soap for their work: and they earned it well!

When the village is situated near a brook or a river, the washing is done in the open air,—in the

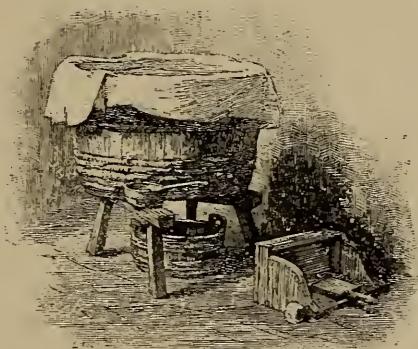
spring under the budding willows and poplars, in the autumn among the yellow leaves scattered by the north-east wind of October. Each woman carries with her a sort of square boat (*bachot*), stuffed with straw, on which she kneels, and the sides of which protect her from the dampness. In Barrois our washerwomen call this object a *carrosse* (coach). This *carrosse* is placed on a bed of stones behind the wash-board, the inclined plane of which rests in the water; and on this the washerwoman rinses her linen, beating it with the bat.

On the shores of Lake Geneva and Lake Annecy, I have noticed quite a different manner of procedure. The washerwomen, bare-armed and bare-legged, go into the water up to their knees, and place in it a table breast high; and on this, they soap and beat the linen, which a companion passes to them, after plunging it into the lake. When the commune is rich, and wishes to spare its members the inconveniences of washing in the open air, exposed to the rain and wind, it builds a wash-house sheltered by a roof; and the women of the village come there for entire afternoons, very busy soaping their linen, and also dealing hard blows at their neighbors' reputations. On the

white wall of one of these wash-houses, in the centre of a village in the Upper-Marne, I remember reading this inscription, written with a bit of charcoal: *Café des Bavardes*, “Babbler’s Café;” and, indeed, there came from it such a noise of lively voices and sharp remarks, that it almost drowned the sound of the bats.

As the linen comes in baskets from the wash-house, it is spread to dry on poles in the large attics, or on lines in the open air when the weather will permit. I still see in my memory the garden all white with linen drying in the sunshine. It was everywhere, on the branches of the plum-trees, on the hedges of box-wood and hawthorn; the wind made these clothes flap and wave like flags; the sun lighted them up with its golden light; all these white spots strewed the verdure with snowy patches. I still hear the chatter of the women folding the clothes and ironing in the attic, with its wide-open windows. And this bustle over the linen coming from the wash, the bursts of spring or autumn sunshine, the gossip of the women at work, flying out through the windows like the twittering of birds, are among the freshest recollections of my early childhood.

When the linen has been ironed and folded, it is put away in piles in the deep, broad chests of chestnut or oak, which are soon filled from bottom to top. Careful housekeepers slip between the piles plants intended to perfume the linen. Sometimes it is bits of orris-root, which smells like violets; sometimes sprigs of lavender; sometimes bunches of melilot, a little yellow flower, with an odor like new-mown hay. The sheets, table-cloths, shirts, and napkins are impregnated with these subtle rustic odors; and when, later on, they are unfolded, all the linen washed at home exhales an unobtrusive, penetrating, wholesome perfume, like domestic life itself.





IN THE WOODS.

BEHOLD the forest all a-quiver
With cool, inviting verdant glades !
Come, plunge, as into some vast river,
Beneath its recreating shades !

Paths where the columbine blooms sweetly,
Sweet, mossy, vanishing woodland ways ;
When you I see. Time rolls back fleetly,
Once more I live my boyhood days.

My verses found inspiring aidance,
Oh, bosky forest ! in your rills :
And if a charm hide in their cadence,
They owe it to your songsters' trills.

Like a dear old nurse so kindly seeming
The mighty forest has cradled me,

Through mystic hours of sweetest dreaming,
With music and with poesy!

Magnificent sovereign of the forest,
Towering amid thy leafy realm,
With ever generous love thou pourest
Thy gifts, the whole world to o'erwhelm!

Of food and shelter 'tis the giver
To man who in its bounty shares:
It feeds the brooklet and the river,
The leaf, the flower, the fruit it bears.

Your shadow when the summer scorches
Doth cool and perfume all the air;
And heat and joy your blazing torches
Among the homes of men doth share.

And if some day the forest perish,
The earth will lose its noblest pride;
And all the beauty that we cherish
Will yield to sadness far and wide.





XVIII.

FAMILIAR LIFE OF THE FOREST.



PEOPLE who never visit the country except in the season between May and October are prone to imagine that the forest is only really beautiful when it is covered with foliage. But painters, hunters, and those generally who frequent the woods in all seasons, know that this is not the case. Winter reveals to us a different aspect of sylvan nature, in which there is a severer grandeur, a more delicate, a soberer coloring, a more mysterious silence. The poet Lenau claimed that a mountain is only truly beautiful when it is bald; one might say also that to judge of the true beauty of a tree it must be seen when

it has lost its leaves. When once its clothing has fallen off, it appears in the mighty ordering of its architecture. We can admire at leisure the bold upshooting of its trunk, the robust frame-work of its boughs, and better grasp the characteristic *ensemble* of its personality. The beech then shows us fully the slender roundness of its silvery column and the graceful drooping of its delicate branches; the oak shows the strong frame of its gnarled trunk and the dramatic attitude of its passionate, black, wild branches; the birch, the free grace of its stem, with its satin-like bark and its waving twigs.

The coloring of the woods in winter, although less striking, is, nevertheless, marvellous. What variety and richness in the delicate neutral tones! — the silvery gray or the brownish black of the bark, the velvety green of the moss, the lustrous green of the holly, the brownish green of the briars, the golden brown of certain lichens, the tawny redness of the dry oak leaves, the marbling of the ivies, the yellow ivory of the dry stems of the grasses. The leaves are no longer upon the trees, but they are on the ground; they form a thick, gently rustling covering of faded, subdued, broken shades, like those of an old Oriental carpet, and in which one can

nevertheless still distinguish the species to which each fragment belongs. There are found the straw-colored leaves of the sycamore, the silky white leaves of the willow or maple, the bright red of the lote-tree, the saffron yellow of the birch, the copper-colored or violet shades of the spoil of the beeches and chestnuts.

Go, some frosty morning in December, and rest your feet on this immense fawn-colored carpet, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, and from which rise the black forest trees, and you will enjoy a dazzling sight. Against the lilac blue of the clear sky, thousands of needles, like diamonds on every branch, sparkle and shed rainbow hues in the broad sunshine; the leaves themselves, scattered over the ground, are powdered with a bluish glazing, and in the sonorous air a fine dust of frost flies about like the little white souls of future flowers.

Return to the same place after the February rains, when the forest washed by the last thaw is still all moist and shivering, when the buds are beginning to swell, and the catkins on the hazel-trees are already swinging their yellow filigree, and if it is towards evening you will again have a delightful feast for the eyes. The sky, where the sun is set-

ting, is tinted with bright carmine and dead gold, against which rise in masses of violet black the sleeping forest trees. Here and there a last ray sends a golden arrow into the dark tangle of the branches, while across the surface of the ponds and the overflowed meadows fly wild ducks with their plaintive cries.

For do not imagine that during the winter season the forest is condemned to silence. In this severe, grandiose scenery original actors live and move incessantly. Early in the morning the woods resound with the blows of the axe and the calls of the woodcutters; here the pruners, bill-hook in hand, are climbing the highest trees; there the charcoal-burner's furnaces give out their bright gleam, and spread their pungent smoke. In the most retired depths, at the bottom of distant valleys, there are busy, familiar guests. Every instant the footpaths are crossed by some field-mouse making a way through the dry leaves. At the end of a ditch, if you walk cautiously, you may be able to see a roebuck and a roe, standing on their slender legs, with their noses in the air; and they will prick up their ears, and suddenly disappear in the thicket.

The summer birds even have not all migrated. The smallest have bravely remained in the thick woods. They enliven the solitude of the great clumps of trees with their wildness and their cries. The wren, with his golden crest, the brown troglo-dyte, or wren, flutters through the underbrush without caring for the frost and cold; and as soon as the February rains have melted the snow the blackbird looks for a place for his nest, and whistles gayly to announce the approach of spring.

Smiling through the frost and the rain, it arrives, in fact, in the midst of alternating sunshine and showers; a shiver runs through the forest,—a damp, springlike shiver. The tops of the lindens are turning red; the cornel-trees are beginning to bloom; the shrubs are venturing to unfold their first green leaves, and the daphne mezereum is opening its pink corollas in the depths of the woods. With April, on every side the white anemones bloom in the midst of the dry leaves; buttercups and cowslips sow the dark ground with yellow stars, and the daffodils bend their golden cups above the brooks. Everything is growing green,—aspens with their yellow leaves, hazel-trees with their thick foliage, witch-elms and beeches



PICKING LILIES-OF-THE-VALLEY.

with their tender verdure; and in the large woods, in clumps, in patches of vigorous green, the double leaf of the lily-of-the-valley makes a display with its aigrets of milky white bells, and perfumes the air.

The forest is full of life when the lilies-of-the-valley begin to bloom. Troops of women and children scatter themselves through the woods, and, stooping under the trees, hastily gather the bunches of fragrant flowers to make bouquets to sell in the market. The city people are fond of the lilies-of-the-valley, which bring to their dark rooms a little of the perfume and charm of the great woods. Large bunches of these little flowers bring as much as ten sous; and to many poor families in the village ten sous are a godsend. So in the early dawn women and girls, dressed in their oldest clothes, wander through the thickets to gather the lily-of-the-valley. Their feet and hands bleed in making a way through the brambles; the sun burns their necks and backs; sometimes a sudden hailstorm wets them to the skin. But still they go on, eager for their harvest. The perfume of the flowers, the singing of the birds, the enchantment of the engarlanded and green-growing forest, is all nothing to

them; they think only of the day's gain. They return at night to the village, worn out, stiff in the joints, exhausted, but clasping in their hands the sous they have earned in the sweat of their faces. And while yonder, in the city houses, the well-to-do people, the poets and lovers, are passionately breathing in the fragrance of the May lilies-of-the-valley, the gatherers of the nosegays are sleeping soundly, and dreaming of beginning again the next day.

As the month of June approaches, the charms of the forest are redoubled. All the rich, abundant bloom of summer expands in the dim light; the blue columbines sway their corollas like madcaps; the milk-white clusters of Virgin's-bower rise graceful and slender beside the strange blossoms of the orchids. It is almost as dark as night under the drooping beech-trees which intertwine their branches, and in this darkness drops of light rain on the black ground, where ferns spread their fanlike fronds; then this cool shade is suddenly cut short by great vistas of grass extending as far as the eye can reach through the forest trees. There mint and centaury grow in the moist ruts; giant beeches cast a healthful shade; there the thrush sings his lively musical

song ; black-heart cherries, strawberries, and wild raspberries redder in the verdure.

The forest is a good foster-mother to its children and neighbors. More than one forest village lives almost the whole year from the products gathered in the woods. In certain hamlets in the forest of Argonne, during the season of strawberries and raspberries, the women form an association together : ten or twelve of the cleverest and most civil go for six weeks to the nearest towns, the others go to the woods to pick strawberries and raspberries ; and every evening a team carries the day's picking to the town, to be sold there for the benefit of the association.

After the raspberries and wild cherries have been gathered, come the walnuts and hazelnuts. "At the feast of Saint Madeleine," says the proverb, "walnuts and hazelnuts are ripe." And the children do not miss the opportunity. August and September see them scattered through the underbrush, turning back every branch of the hazel bushes, in order to pull off the twin nuts wrapped up in their green, ragged hoods. The girls and boys stuff their pockets with them, the women fill linen bags, and keep them for provision for the winter evenings.

As autumn approaches, the forest becomes more and more generous. Not only is its fruit plentiful, but its kitchen-garden abounds in a most nourishing vegetable—I mean the mushroom.

Rains have soaked the ground. Under the thick shade the strange population of cryptogams comes up and grows in a night. All the varieties of mushrooms are scattered there, lifting the dry leaves, dominating the tufts of grass set in the trunks of trees. They are of every shape and every color,—great brown, humpbacked hats, frail gray parasols, wide whitish cups holding the water of the last shower in their hollows, bishop's mitres of a chamois yellow, delicate, spreading branches, as pink as coral, snowy puffy balls.

The agarisci, the boleti, the agaricus cantharellus, and the clavaria grow there in abundance; only one must keep one's eyes open and look closely. Tares are found beside the wheat; and woe to the imprudent one who, deceived by a perfidious resemblance, falls on a poisonous mushroom! Every edible variety has almost always a counterpart growing in its vicinity. Thus the *cèpe*, that savory boletus, the brown, smoky cap of which has given it the surname of *charbonnier*, has for first cousin the

deadly boletus. Both present, at first glance, the same appearance of shape, size, and color. However, the edible *cèpe* is cream colored underneath, has white meat, breaking and smelling like an apple, while its relative, the poisoner, is reddish underneath, turns green when broken, and exhales a nauseous odor. In the same way, the *oronge*, that royal mushroom, as yellow as sunshine, has for a sister the terrible amanita, the *false oronge*, the red cap of which is covered with a leprous whiteness. The small white mushroom, growing in hazel copses, has also for a twin the agaricus nebulosus, which is not worth much, and is the caricature of the first.

The woodcutters and charcoal-burners, who make the mushroom their principal food, do not allow themselves to be easily deceived by these semi-resemblances. Their long experience prevents them from making mistakes. It is not so with women and children, who, having once seen an edible boletus or agaricus, think they recognize it in a false brother which they come across, and bring home basketfuls of mushrooms, among which more than one suspicious specimen has slipped in. So every year in forest lands there occurs some fatal accident due to eating a poisonous cryptogam.

Fortunately there exist harmless varieties with which there is no possible danger. The mushroom of a golden yellow color, with its cap coquettishly turned up and curled, is the *chanterelle* or *gyrole*, commonly known by the name of *chevrette*; the one sometimes pearl gray, sometimes salmon pink, resembling a bunch of coral, is the *clavaria* or *menotte*. Here is the golden *lactarius*, the delicate lamellæ of which transude an amber-colored liquid; the agaricus *élevé* or *colmelle*, with its ring and its parasol; the *helvelle*, the cap of which looks like a bishop's mitre; and not far away, the tribe of the *hydnes*, with eccentric foot, the fragrance of the apricot, cap of chamois yellow adorned underneath with hundreds of vertical needles. All these varieties, as well as the white mushroom with pink under-side (*agaricus des pâtis*), are sure to be harmless, and can be used to form a dish both nourishing and delicious. Season them with butter, with sorrel leaves by way of fine herbs, a bit of garlic, and a few drops of lemon juice, wet them with fresh cream, and, as Brillat-Savarin says, "You will see something wonderful!"

At the same time that the mushrooms of every variety appear in the forests and copses, the beech-

trees are covered with nuts. The nuts are enclosed in reddish, wrinkled envelopes, which ripen the last of September, at nearly the same time as the prickly burrs of the chestnuts. These capsules open, and drop their brown triangular seeds, which fall with a dry sound, and cover the ground all about. Then the woods are noisy. Women, old men, children, hasten from the neighboring villages to gather the nuts. They spread large white cloths under every tree; they shake the branches by hitting them with a pole, and the nuts come down in a shower. The beechnut is very savory. Our peasants make an oil from it by submitting the kernels, enclosed in new linen bags, to high pressure. This oil, extracted cold, is as good as olive oil; it has the advantage of keeping for years without losing its quality, and it is used for frying a delicate, tempting, golden brown.

The gathering of beechnuts is peculiar to our forests in the north-east. In the woods around Paris, in the forests of the south-east, in the middle and west, chestnuts are especially gathered at the same time of year. Throughout entire departments the chestnut forms the basis of food for the peasants. Chestnuts are exported in great quantities. The

chestnuts of Savoy, known by the name of *marrons de Lyon*, are the largest and most desirable.

The dull sound of the chestnuts falling on the moss in the hazy October mornings is one of the first impressions of my childhood. They would roll to my feet in the woods of Marly, while the pale blue sky smiled through the yellow tree-tops half stripped of their leaves, and in the distance could be heard the shouts of the vintagers among the vines.

It is also at this time that the pigs are brought to get the acorns in the oak forests. Under the influence of the first cold weather, the acorns are detached from their gray cups, and drop on the stony ground. The astringent, bitter nut is very much appreciated by young pigs, and they gorge themselves, and grow fat before one's very eyes.

At the beginning of fall the forest seems to grow still more maternal, and she finishes pouring out her full horn of plenty for man and beast. The wild plums are turning blue in the thickets; wild apples and pears display their sour, pale green fruit in the midst of the reddening foliage of the wild stock. The berries of the cornel-trees, like vermillion olives, ripen beside the crimson barberry-bushes,

and from the tops of the lote-trees hang bunches of berries, in taste and color like little medlars. The white frosts of October allow all these fruits to grow mellow, and give them a sweeter flavor. It is the favorite season of the thrushes, blackbirds, and redbreasts. They fall in flocks upon the fruit-trees of the forest; and when the astringent berries have dried their throats too much, they go in a flight to quench their thirst at the gurgling springs in the neighborhood. Unfortunately there are also lime-twigs, traps, and snares set by the hunters of birds, and then look out for the frying-pan and the Dutch oven !

Leaf by leaf the woods are laid bare, and now high up in the sky flocks of wild ducks announce the coming of winter. Leaping from branch to branch in the beeches and hazel-trees, the squirrels hurry to glean the last beechnuts and hazelnuts for their winter provision. In Saint-Martin's summer their chattering and nibbling are still heard, breaking the silence of the forest, already half asleep under the white frost, forerunner of the great snows.



XIX.

WOOD-CUTTING.



THE forest resembles human society in more than one respect, — it has an aristocracy, a middle class, and the common, unknown people ; trees of noble growth which every one knows, by name at least, and the more humble species which hardly any one notices. The great lords of the forest are the fir-tree, the oak, the beech, and the chestnut ; but besides these princely races, there are the people of trees and shrubs, the appearance of which is as original, although not so well known.

Curious monographs might be written on these secondary species abounding in our woods, all of which have very different habits and usages. The enumeration alone of these various species is not enough. We must note in passing, and with a characteristic word, the appearance and manner of living belonging to each individual. There is the hornbeam, with its light foliage, its elegant nodosity, and its graceful, spreading branches; the ash, with its hard wood, slender trunk, and pinnated leaves, around which buzz the Spanish flies; the aspen and the birch, with their smooth, satin-like bark, nervous foliage, continually in motion; the maple and the sycamore, two first cousins, with lobed leaves, bark which decays easily, and wood valuable for carpentry; the linden, loved by the bees, with its supple bark, fragrant flowers, and leaves as sweet as honey; the alder and the willow growing near running water; the hazel-tree, with its healthful, bushy shade; the lote-tree, beloved by thrushes; the service-tree, preferred by bullfinches and blackbirds; the holly and the boxwood, hard, resisting, and ever green; the wild cherry, or wood of Sainte-Lucie, with its fragrant branches.

All these varieties are well known to foresters,

who take great account of their qualities and different characters when they are considering the cultivation or felling of trees.

According to the rules of forestry, woods should be felled as the trees reach their maturity. This maturity is announced by exterior signs, which the trained eye of the forester promptly recognizes. When the annual shoots are strong and lengthened out, when the foliage is abundant and large, the bark unbroken, the young branches supple, it is evident that the tree is still growing in size and height; but when the shoots do not lengthen the branches more than the length of the bud, there will be no more growth, either in height or diameter, and the wood has reached its natural maturity. The inclination of the branches towards the horizon furnishes as well very sure indications in the case of isolated trees. They indicate, for example, that a tree is in its full vigor when its branches describe an angle of from forty to fifty degrees, and that it is on the decline when the angles fall to seventy degrees. Besides, the age or maturity of forest trees, especially of the oak, is recognized by an especial and exceptional fertility: *In senecta*, said Pliny, *fertilissimæ glandiferæ*. When all these in-

dications are found together, it can be assured that the tree will grow no more, and that it is ripe for felling.

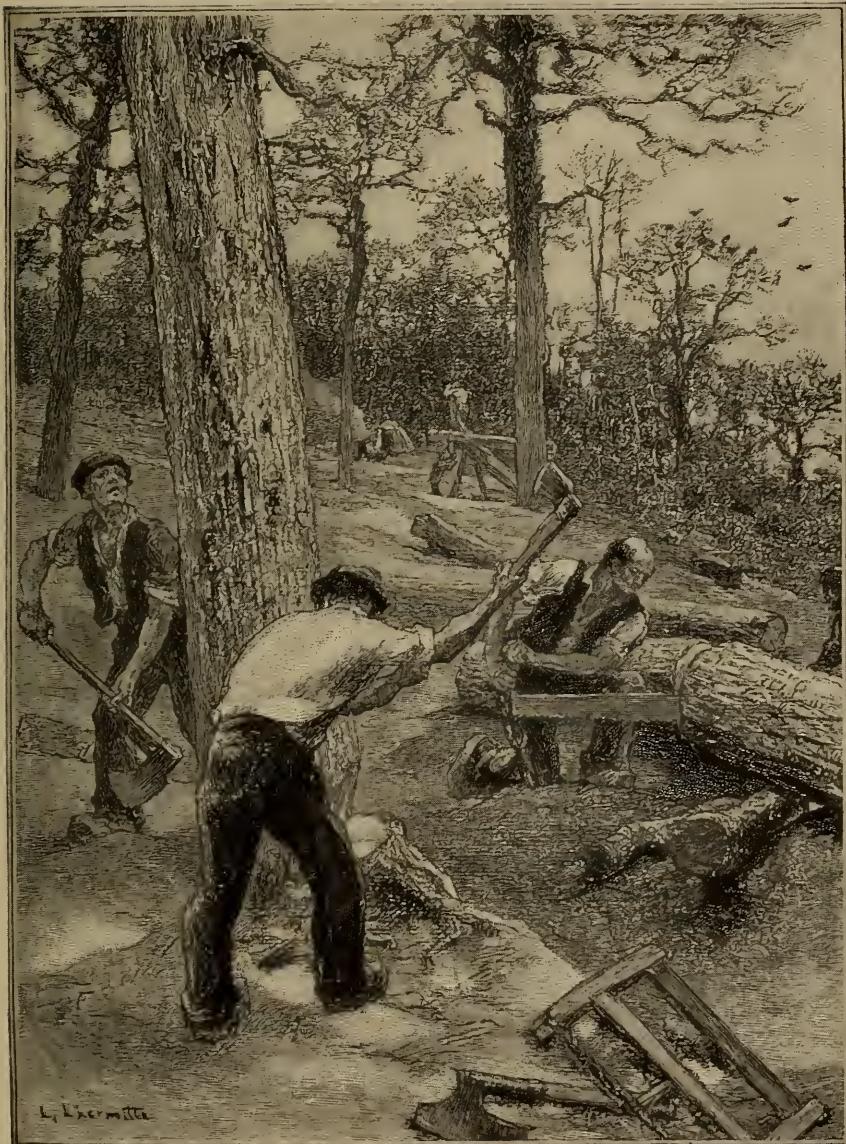
The most favorable season for cutting trees is the beginning of winter; that is to say, the time when the sap seems to be dormant. On this point science and tradition agree; the ancient rules of forestry forbade the felling contractors to cut any wood in the forests "while the sap was circulating; namely, from the middle of May until the middle of September." At the present time the contracts for wood-cutting are made the last of September, and the felling of the sections awarded generally begins with winter.

When the contracts have been made, each contractor takes the most expeditious means to cut the section or felling which has been assigned to him. As soon as he has recruited the necessary workmen for clearing the woods,—the pruners, cutters, fagot-makers,—as soon as he has commissioned the woodcutter's agent appointed to oversee the work, the felling begins. The woodcutters, divided into gangs, arrive on the spot, and prepare to cut down the trees marked for felling.

The woodcutter's first work—when the canton

where the work is to be done is too far from any village, and the workmen cannot go home every evening — consists in building a hut to shelter the men and their tools. This hut or cabin, the site of which is chosen by the *administration forestière*, generally assumes a conical shape; it is built with stakes and branches intertwined, the whole is covered on the outside with sods of grassy earth, over which the rain is carried off, and which protect the sleepers from the wind and dampness. Inside, two field-beds, raised above the ground, and covered with moss, straw, and brakes, serve as a sleeping-place for the woodcutters; between these two litters is left an empty space opposite to the entrance, and in these narrow limits the workmen cook and eat their food.

The day for building the hut is a festal day. They celebrate it by swallowing a great many bumpers of wine, and especially brandy; so that when night comes the whole crowd is quite exhilarated, and the men, half intoxicated, stretch themselves out on the very ground where the felling is to be made. But the next day the work begins in earnest. The overseer is no joker; they must set about their task, and work hard, although their



TREE-FELLING.

tongues are thick, their backs bent, and their limbs stiff. The woodcutter's work is rough. According to the rules of forestry, the trees must be cut with the axe, and as close to the ground as possible; the use of the bill-hook or saw is strictly prohibited; the stocks or stumps must be cut level with the ground, smooth, and slightly sloping, in order to prevent the rain-water from standing on them, and causing them to decay.

When large trees are to be felled, the task demands vigorous muscular strength, an accurate eye, and, above all, long experience. A master woodcutter, understanding his business, should cut the tree from twelve to eighteen inches from the foot, and lay it on the ground "as if it had been given a single cut with a razor."

Nothing is more dramatic and affecting than the fall of a lofty beech-tree or oak. The repeated blows of the axe leave the great tree at first immovable and haughty; the woodcutters redouble their efforts, and at times the trunk trembles and quivers from the base to the summit like a living personality. Then one understands all the energetic truth of Sophocles' comparison when he said, Ægisthus and Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon "like

woodcutters felling an oak." The steel of the axe makes the bark, sapwood, and the heart of the wood fly in showers; but the tree recovers its impassibility, and stoically submits to the assault of the cutters. To see it still straight and proud in the air, it seems as if it would never fall. Suddenly the woodcutters draw back; there is a moment of waiting which is terribly solemn, then suddenly the enormous trunk sways, and falls to the ground with a tragic crash of broken branches. A sound like a lamentation runs through the hazy forest; then all becomes silent again, and the woodcutters, with unconscious emotion, contemplate the giant lying on the ground.

Then begins the work of lopping the branches. The principal branches, when sawed off, are destined for carpentry or fuel, according to their size and state of health; the small twigs serve for making fagots. Sometimes, when it is desirable to obtain the branches whole, unharmed by the fall, they are taken off while the tree is still standing. A workman with sharp spurs on his feet, carrying a rope with a slip-noose in his hand, climbs the tree, with the help of the spurs which he plunges into the bark, leather kneecaps worn on the legs, and the

rope which he fastens to the branches as he mounts. While climbing, he supports himself with a knot, hangs from his rope, and cuts off the branches with a bill-hook. It is a dangerous employment, full of risks. To perform it requires the agility of a squirrel, and the ability to crawl around the trunks with the dexterity of a woodpecker; above all, it requires a steady head. When the branch-cutter has hoisted himself to the top of the tree, in order to deprive it of its last branches, the least breeze rocks him on the summit, now flexible and cracking. Above him he sees the clouds passing by; beneath he sees, as far as his eye can reach, the undulating sea of green or yellowing foliage of the forest. If dizziness seizes him, or if a branch which he thinks solid breaks beneath his feet, it is all over with him; and he is precipitated, bleeding, on the ground. Such accidents happen sometimes; but in spite of the difficulties and risks of the profession, the branch-cutters love this adventurous occupation, and are glad to pass in this way a good part of their life between heaven and earth.

When the felling is over, the wood that has been cut is divided into two categories,—that which is intended for timber-work and carpentry, and that

reserved for burning. The latter, in round or split sticks, is piled and measured on the ground of the clearing; the smaller branches intended for charcoal are piled separately, as well as the fagots made up by the fagot-makers. The wood for timbers with the bark still on is transported whole by means of trucks, underneath the axles of which the enormous trunks of beech, fir, or oak are fastened by chains or cables. Often the large pieces are sawed up on the spot, and in this case the sawyers establish their woodyard in the clearing. When the forest is traversed by water-courses, the sawing is done by machinery, and permanent sawmills lift their wooden buildings above the streams, and their shafts are turned by a wheel, over which the running water is scattered like rain.

Nothing is more picturesque than these rustic sawmills, astride the brooks, shaded by the edge of the forest, and sending afar the bubbling water, the strident sound of the saw, the aromatic odor of freshly cut boards.

When the forests have no very abrupt slopes, when they are penetrated by good roads, transporting the wood away from the clearing is easily effected in carts. But in the mountains, the can-

tons where the felling is done are frequently situated on slopes too steep for any conveyance to reach. In such cases the wood is sent to the bottom of the valley through almost perpendicular slides, called *coulloires*, where it descends rapidly. It is a very primitive mode, in use principally in the Alps and the Pyrenees. But in more ingenious countries they make from the woods to the winding road at the bottom of the valley, tracks on a very inclined plane, formed by logs fastened to cross-beams. Trains loaded with piles of wood slide slowly over these primitive tramways, conducted by a single man, who regulates the speed of the train by leaning his back against it and bracing himself against the logs of the track as it descends the slope. This is the method of the *schlitteurs*, very much in vogue in the Vosges and in Alsace.

There is still another mode of transportation which I ought to mention here; but this is not looked upon with favor by the forest administration, because it is employed principally by the gatherers of dead wood, and trespassers. I mean the carrying of wood on a man's back.

Among the people on the borders, it has always been admitted that the forest ought to support the

village. Indeed, under the feudal system it frequently happened that the seigneurs generously ceded to the commune, or transferred in exchange for certain services, numerous rights in the forests belonging to them,—the right to cut wood for fuel and for wheelwright's use; the right to gather acorns, and for common pasturage; the right to burn charcoal, and to gather the forest fruits, dead wood, and dead leaves. When after the promulgation of the forest laws the administration took in hand the management of the forests, it began by severely revising all these privileges, and by reducing them as strictly as possible.

Among the privileges taken from the communes by the forest regulations, none was felt more by the peasants living on the borders of the forest than the gathering of dead wood. This was a resource to poor creatures who counted on this windfall to keep themselves warm in the winter season. So, in spite of the law and the guards, this gathering is made every day. The administration itself is indulgent on this point, and shuts its eyes; it is implacable only when the green wood is concerned. So, as soon as fall comes, in the paths of the woods one meets more than one old man or woman bent

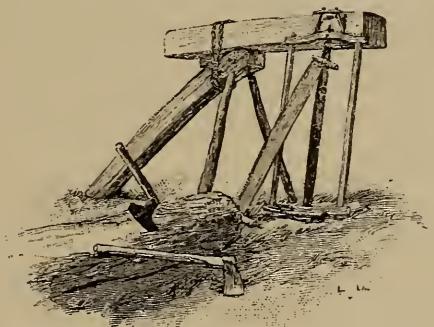
over beneath a load of dead branches on the back, and walking towards the nearest village. The gatherers of dead wood are to the woodcutters what the gleaners are to the harvesters. They wander through the forest, every corner of which is familiar to them. They appear especially after stormy days or nights, when the high winds of October have covered the ground of the forest with *débris*. Sometimes, it must be admitted, they help to change the green wood to dead wood. A stroke with the billhook is very quickly made in a tuft of shoots; the green wood thus cut off is left to dry in the underbrush, then a week or two later they pass by, and without the least remorse pick up the branch, now useless.

Other rovers, still less scrupulous, have no hesitation in cutting a green bough of good size, and slipping it into their bundle, where it disappears among the dead branches. But the foresters have their eyes open. Just as the delinquent is slyly leaving the forest, a guard suddenly falls on him, forces him to untie his bundle of fagots, detects the presence of the green wood, and enters a complaint against him, after confiscating the *corpus delicti*, in spite of the fagot-maker's lamentations.

Culprits of this sort are very numerous, but the foolish little thefts which they commit do not harm the forest to any extent. The greatest source of trouble to the guard is the habitual offender, who makes the illicit removal of wood a business and a trade. This forest ravager practises his profession boldly by night. He pulls up the young shoots by hundreds to sell; he cuts the finest branches from the cornel-trees, the holly, and the wild medlar-tree to make whip handles; he breaks down the young trees unmercifully, and does not even respect the very old ones. In addition to this he has several occupations, and to the profession of trespasser joins that of poacher. His familiarity with the woods makes him acquainted with all the haunts where game is to be found, all the paths where it goes.

He hunts small and large game, feathers and fur alike, but not with the gun, which would too easily put the guards on his track, but with good snares of horse-hair or wire. I knew one who made his traps so ingeniously that he caught deer in his snares, and one day a horse wandering through the woods was completely strangled in a master slip-noose of wire stretched by this desperate poacher. The foresters had entered mountains of complaints

against him, but he laughed at them and their documents. The court condemned him; but as he had no seizable property, and lived in the woods, he did not care. Sometimes the officers would catch him: he would sleep in prison for two months, and then quickly return to take up his vagabond life again. One winter's day he was found dead in a valley where he had spread his snares. He had been intoxicated the day before, had been overcome by the cold, and congestion had stiffened him out in the depths of the forest.

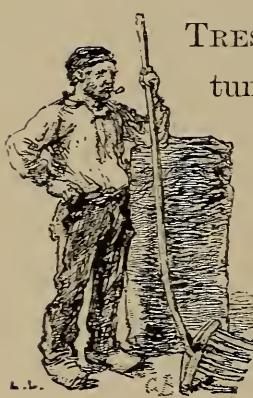




XX.

FOREST INDUSTRIES.

CHARCOAL-BURNERS. — MAKERS OF WOODEN SHOES. —
COOPERS.



TRESPASSERS and poachers are very fortunately not the only working people who live in the forest, and practise their professions there. The woods give food and shelter to those following more honest and useful pursuits. In the first rank among these workmen of the woods are the charcoal-burners.

The making of wood charcoal is without ques-

tion one of the most important forest industries. It is carried on in winter as well as summer, and the charcoal-burner passes almost all his life under the thick shade of the trees. Generally he is born in the forest, grows up there, is married, and founds a family himself there. He belongs to a nomadic tribe, never passing more than one season in the same spot, and living wherever there is a chance of felling to be made,—sometimes at the bottom of a valley, sometimes on the side of a wooded slope. His house is the conical hut with a roof of sods of which I have previously spoken; his workshop is established in the open air, and his work is carried on in all weathers,—rain, snow, or sunshine,—at all hours of the day and night. So an encampment of charcoal-burners is always numerous; independent of the wife and children, there is always a partner and an apprentice.

When the master charcoal-burner has made a bargain with a forest contractor, he establishes himself on the land of the clearing, and begins to construct his furnaces, which are commonly called charcoal-pits.

Not all situations are suitable for making charcoal. First of all it is necessary to select a good

cuisage; that is, a place sheltered from the wind, and situated near the forest roads. Then they proceed to the building of the furnace, a delicate operation, requiring patience and knowledge. On the chosen spot they count off eight paces for the diameter of the furnace. In the centre, by driving poles into the ground, they form a circular space to serve as the fire-pit. The first sticks, or *attelles*, which are placed around this space, have to be very dry, and split in quarters, the upper end resting against the poles. All about is placed a row of round sticks, then a second, a third, and so on, until the whole surface of the circle has been covered. This is the first bed.

On this first layer a second is placed called the *éclisse*; and this is continued, always bringing the concentric rows nearer together, so that the successive layers give to the whole furnace the conical form of an inverted funnel. When the building is finished they proceed to the dressing. The charring of the wood for charcoal requires the combustible to be thickly covered, in order to keep out the air, and allow the wood to be smothered as it were. So the furnace is covered with a garnishment of twigs, over which is placed a layer of fresh earth three

fingers deep; finally over the whole is spread the *frasil*, that is to say, very fine black ashes taken from an old charcoal-pit.

The top of the furnace is left open, and communicates with the tubular space formed in the middle. Through this the fire is placed inside by means of brush and burning coals. As at the base of the charcoal kiln, there are openings leading from this central tube to the outside, a current of air is established, the tube serving as a chimney, and the wood begins to burn.

Then comes the real fatigue and anxiety of the work. When the smoke, which is at first white, becomes darker and more pungent, the openings are stopped with earth; then, twelve hours later, a little air is let in. The charcoal-burner should always know the condition of his fire, and must have constant control over it. If the coal roars, it shows that the burning is going on too rapidly; then, with a rake, *frasil* is spread over the openings, and the draft is thus checked. If the wind rises, there is another anxiety; the kiln has to be sheltered with large screens of osier, which serve as a protection. From the time when the fire is started, the charcoal-burners have not an instant

of rest; they are obliged to watch like vestal virgins around their fire, and they take turns day and night like sentinels.

Finally, after a thousand trials and anxieties, the burning is finished. The furnace gradually flattens, and the smoke becomes less and less dense. Now it rises in soft bluish spirals. The kiln is opened on one side, and the charcoal appears. If the burning has been accomplished under favorable conditions, and according to the rules of the art, it should be as black as a blackberry, heavy, and ringing as clear as silver. Sometimes it happens that in spite of all these precautions the operation fails; then the round sticks which are poorly burned are put into another furnace.

When the charcoal has been drawn out to the open air with rakes, it is left to get completely cool; then it is loaded in large carts, and carried to the forge or the warehouse, provided the roads are passable and not too steep; in this case it is conveyed on the backs of mules.

This life, with its nights of watching and little sleep, of continually being on the alert, of constantly renewed anxiety, makes the charcoal-burner a taciturn, nervous, melancholy being. He is almost al-

ways grave, rarely jovial. The habit of passing a part of the day and night as sentinel makes him gloomy and meditative. He never cheers up except when a kiln is opened and the burning is good, or occasionally at supper-time, when, surrounded by his wife and children, he partakes of a simple meal consisting of a squirrel stew or a roast hedgehog, with clear water or sour wine. In autumn a dish of mushrooms *à la brochette*, and a dessert of nuts and cornel-berries, are added to this bill of fare. Then, after chatting for a half-hour with his family, they each return to their work; the master and the boys go to watch the five or six kilns which blaze and roar under the ashes, while the wife nurses her baby, or rocks it on the threshold of the hut, and sings an old rustic song in a low voice. Soon night comes, the children go to sleep, and nothing more is seen in the darkness, increased by the thick foliage, but the red blaze from the furnaces, and the long, dark shadows of the men watching and moving around the kilns.

Although this life is so hard, and the pleasures which enliven it are so few and far between, the charcoal-burner loves it and never wearies of it. This free, nomadic existence in the woods has a

stern, wild poetry about it which the charcoal-burner breathes in unconsciously, and which makes him think all sedentary occupations monotonous. The forest is as necessary to him as bread. He lives there, laboriously, solitary, frugally, but it seems to him as if he could not live elsewhere; and if by chance he is obliged to stay for a time in the town or village, he is seized with homesickness.

A poet of my acquaintance, who is my most intimate friend, has tried to describe in a few verses the rough, original life of the charcoal-burner; and I cannot resist the temptation to reproduce here this song, which quite faithfully relates the few joys of this honest toiler in the forest: -

"There is no one so free as the charcoal man,
As he warms his hands by his fire!

He is absolute master to do and to plan,
And to live as his heart may desire.

Had he treasure untold,
And a palace of gold,
He could not to more pleasure aspire!

The infinite forest he owns for a home,
The sky is his window above;
His light-hearted children grow round him, and roam
Neath the bowers where the woodmen know of!



CHARCOAL-BURNERS IN THE FOREST.

They pillow their heads
On their soft grassy beds,
And the nightingales teach them of love!

He is born in the forest, and there he will die
Mid the beech and the pine and the oak;
Neath a furnace of boughs his body will lie
Surrounded by reverent folk:
As the charcoals turn black,
His soul will fly back
To heaven on the wings of the smoke!"

If the charcoal-burner is silent and melancholy, the maker of wooden shoes, on the contrary, is jolly and noisy. This is largely owing to the different conditions of life to which the temperament of the latter is accustomed. In the first place, there is no work at night; the shoemaker sleeps his fill, as well as his partners, apprentices, and his whole household; then the work is done methodically, surely, without any of the hurry and anxiety which oppress the charcoal-maker's temper.

The maker of wooden shoes is a nomad like the charcoal man; his successive residences are dependent upon the vicissitudes of wood-cutting. To-day his hut is set up on the border of a brook; the next season he will camp on a plain; but it is no matter to him. Like a bird of passage, he traverses all the

cantons of the forest, stopping wherever a clearing has just been made, and where he can find a good market. He is, however, bound to the village by one slender tie. He possesses there, in some hamlet, a house with closed blinds, dusty furniture, beams covered with spiders' webs; but he never lives in it except in the dull seasons, and only retires to it definitely to take to his bed and die.

The best part of his life is spent in the forest. He takes his wife and children there, and establishes himself at the bottom of some verdant valley, watered by a spring two or three feet from the clearing, where the trees bought standing and blazed by the purchaser are found. The best wood for making shoes is walnut; but in our eastern countries, where walnut-trees are very scarce, beech-wood is generally used by our shoemakers. So the master selects, as far as possible, lots where beech-trees are in the majority. No great value is attached to the alder, aspen, and birch, although these varieties are also used for the manufacture; but the shoes made from them are of spongy wood, and the dampness quickly penetrates them. Give me the sabots of beech-wood! They are light, close-grained, and keep the feet dry and warm.

A beech-tree about fifty feet in height, and a metre in circumference where it begins to branch, will make six dozen pairs of shoes. Each trunk is sawed into sections, and if the logs are too large they are split in quarters with the coulter. A workman first rough hews the shoe with a hatchet, taking care to give to the left foot a curve different from the right; then he passes these rough draughts to a second workman, who begins to bore holes in them with a gimlet, and gradually hollows out the inside with an instrument called the *cuiller*. While all this work is going on, the shoemaker sings like an oriole, as he digs out the tender wood, making ringlets of white shavings as delicate and lustrous as ribbons, and the work is performed amidst laughter and rustic songs.

The largest shoes are made from sections of wood next the stump. These are worn on the feet of sturdy men,—the solid soles of the ploughman or the day-laborer, who in the early dawn goes out in the rain and the wind to his daily work. In the gray hours of the morning they resound over the pavements of our still deserted streets on the peasants' feet as they go to market, while we indolent creatures hear them in our dreams echoing

on the flags. From the smaller sections are made the women's shoes,—the quick shoe of the house-wife, always in motion, and the slenderer, more elegant shoe of the young girl.

As the last sections of the beech trunk are reached, the logs grow smaller; from these are made the shoes worn by the little shepherd or the goose-girl, who walks over the bare stubble-fields after her flock. They also make shoes for the schoolboy from them, shoes quickly worn out on the way to school, and subjected to rough treatment, whether the inventive rascal transforms them into boats and sails them on the pond, or in winter sits on his feet, and uses them as a sled to descend the long snowy slopes, changed into slides by the frost. The last of the wood is used for *cotillons*, that is, sabots for the little children. These have the happiest fate; they are petted and fondled, especially on the day after Christmas, and then they never get tired, for they are rarely used. As soon as the little fellow grows up, his tiny shoes, grown too small, are considered precious; they are carefully laid away in the bottom of a chest with his baptismal robe and cap.

When the sabot has been hollowed out and shaped

with the *rouette*, the *pareur* smoothes the edges, then passes it to a third workman, whose task is to give it its final shape by means of the *paroir*, a sort of sharp knife fastened with a ring to a stationary bench. This third workman, who is usually the master shoemaker himself, finishes and polishes the shoe, on which, in case it is intended for a woman's foot, he carves a rose or a cowslip according to his fancy. As they are finished, the shoes are placed in rows in the house under a thick covering of shavings to keep them from cracking. Once or twice a week the apprentices expose them to a fire of green branches, which smokes them, hardens the wood, and gives them a warm, golden-brown color.

The work goes on in this way until all the trees have been used. Then they start out in search of a new clearing. All the year round, the forest as it grows green or red hears in some one of its cantons the workshop humming like a hive, and the shoemakers gayly making dozens of this rustic footwear, — which our ancestors the Celts used to make in their deep forests, — simple, healthful, and primitive, like the forest life itself.

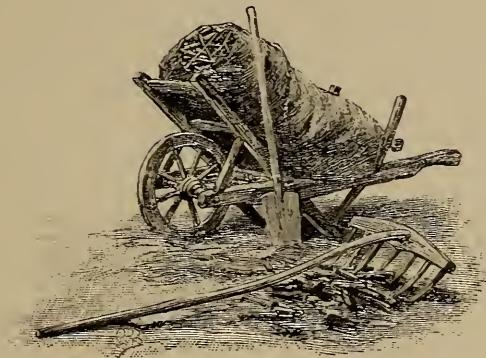
Another manufacturer, whose customs are very similar to those of the shoemaker, likewise sets up

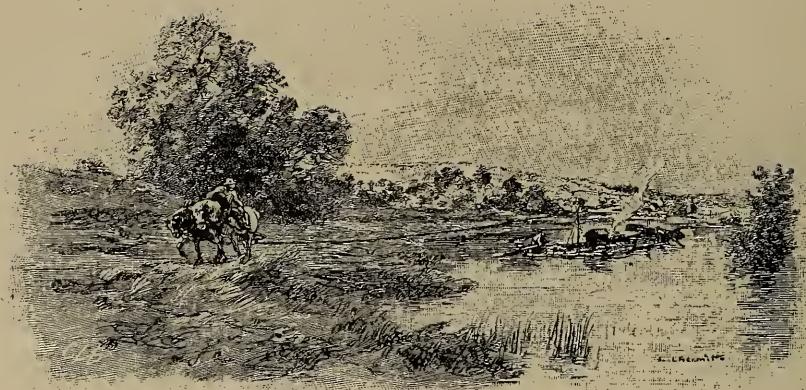
his shop on the edge of the clearings; this is the wood-worker. Wood-working comprises all those small wooden utensils found in every household,—milking-pails, churns for making butter, ladles and salad spoons, three-legged stools, the salt-box which hangs from the mantelpiece, the *vasot* in which the dishes are washed, and even the cup to drink out of. All these rustic vessels are made in the forest by artless workmen, who for generations have worked at this itinerant trade, without changing in the least the primitive design and elementary form of the objects they make. For centuries the churn has been made according to the same rules, and the salt-box bears on its sides the same rudimentary flower engraved in white on the brown wood.

In the Vosges, where this industry is carried on extensively, wood-working is done principally with fir-wood. In the forests of the Meuse and the Upper-Marne, they prefer the beech and maple. All those rustic salt-boxes with which our peasant women decorate their mantelpieces are generally made of this last variety. Occasionally, through carving the wood and regarding nature, an artist is born among these workmen; and all the remark-

able school of wood-carving, which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries decorated our houses and our churches, probably had its root in the wood-worker's shops of that time.

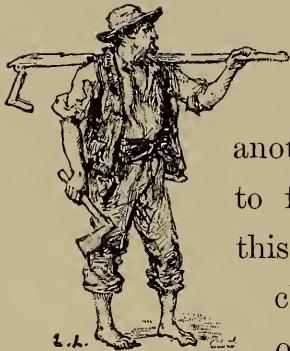
At the present time, in Switzerland, the wood-worker has extended his industry to the making of those bears and chamois displayed in the shops of the towns, even at the entrance of the hotels perched on the mountain-tops, and which people commonly carry away in their trunks as precious relics of their classical tour through the Oberland.





X X I.

THE FLOATAGE OF WOOD.



INDEPENDENTLY of the methods already described, there exists still another mode of transportation peculiar to felled wood,—that is, *floatage*; but this can only be resorted to when the clearing is near a watercourse, a river, or a canal. The floating of logs or rafts has been known in France since 1449. It is said that at that time a wood merchant, a citizen of Paris named Rouvé, conceived the idea of bringing dry wood from Morvan down the Seine. By means of locks he retained the water in the small streams above Cravant, and caused dry logs to be

thrown into them. They floated down into the river Yonne, and there they were gathered into rafts to be driven to Paris. The enthusiastic Parisians celebrated the arrival of the first rafts with bonfires. The enterprise being successful, other merchants imitated him, and among them a Lorrainian named Arnoul, who made our brooks in Lisle and Louppy-en-Barrois *floatable*, and in this way was able to supply Paris with wood taken from the forests of Barrois and Champagne. Thus the industry of floatage was founded.

All those who have strolled over the bridges of Paris must have noticed the enormous rafts of fire-wood coming down the stream, driven by two or four men, and gliding majestically under the arches. They are brought into the Seine by all the tributaries of the river,—the Yonne, the Marne, the Oise. They come from Argonne, from the Upper-Marne, le Châtillonnais, Morvan, from the forests of Compiègne and Fontainebleau. These millions of logs cut in so many different provinces come down and are piled up in the wood-yards of the suburbs, and their brands and embers blaze in our small Parisian fireplaces.

Floatage is used for firewood or short wood, and

building or long wood. It is well known that all kinds of wood, especially when it is very dry, having a specific gravity less than water, floats when it is thrown into a stream large enough to hold it. The whole theory of floatage is founded on this principle; only, in order to apply it, it is necessary to study the course and the depth of the streams. A river is said to be floatable when it holds a sufficient quantity of water in the spring, and does not present too abrupt curves or heaps of rocks to obstruct the passage of the rafts.

A raft is a float formed of a number of pieces of wood or logs, held together by long poles fastened to them by withes or twigs. In this way rafts are made of firewood, building-wood, and sawed wood.

Rafts of firewood are usually composed of eighteen *coupons*, or partial collections of logs, four metres long, which makes the entire length of the raft about seventy metres. The width is in proportion to that of the rivers or canals through which the float is to pass. Some rafts are only three lengths of the logs in width, and are called rafts with three branches; others have four branches (nearly five metres), and furnish ordinarily twenty-five cords of wood, or fifty loads.



THE FLOATAGE OF WOOD.

The coupons of three or four branches are made on land; they are not put together until they are afloat. The logs forming each branch are brought from the forest to the nearest port. They begin by making on the slope of the canal or river a slide or chute, composed of perches from seven to eight centimetres apart, and held by strong logs diminishing in size as they approach the water. As soon as a coupon of logs is collected, it is pushed into the water by sliding it over the poles of this chute. The branches are held together by cross-pieces formed of poles five metres long; they are fastened with withes in every place where the cross-pieces cross and meet the logs, and this forms a coupon. The eighteen coupons which form a raft are all alike except the head coupon, the middle one, and the tail coupon, to which are added thole-pins. These thole-pins or props serve to support the pole by means of which the men push and guide the raft.

If the wood is heavy, either on account of its good quality or the excess of water or sap with which it is impregnated, the raft is kept afloat with empty casks well corked, and fastened to the underside of the logs and the middle branches.

Collecting and starting the logs is merry work.

It is done in the open air, among large aquatic plants, shave-grass, and mint, perfuming the air, and above which flutter swarms of little blue butterflies. The poplars which border the shore refresh the workmen with their trembling shade, and the water of the river lulls them with its murmur; while the birds friendly to running water, the wagtails and the warblers in the reeds, delight them with their melodious notes.

When the raft has been put together, it is pushed into the stream, the current of which it follows. It is guided with the pole, which is carried with one end at the bottom of the river and the other against the thole-pin; in this way it is given a push in the direction it is meant to take. When the water is low, the work is often very difficult. When, on the contrary, the water is too deep to allow the pole to be used, long oars are employed, and with these the raft is kept exactly in the current. Two men are usually sufficient to conduct a raft of twenty-five cords of wood on the rivers which flow into the Seine; but as this river is larger, and navigation more dangerous, especially when the water is high, four men are oftener employed to conduct a raft.

When the raft is pushed obliquely to the current

of the stream, it sometimes happens that the forward part goes more slowly than the rear, either because it is in a less rapid current, or because it rubs against a muddy bottom; then the current takes the rear sidewise, and there is danger of breaking the raft. In this case it is necessary to cut the ties quickly at the place where the raft threatens to give way, and to separate it into two small rafts, which they try to land on the nearest shore, in order to rearrange them and continue the journey.

I remember witnessing one day an accident of this sort in the middle of Paris. An enormous raft of firewood was coming down the Seine very swiftly at that moment. It had just passed under one of the arches of the bridge of les Saints-Pères without hindrance, when, from the effect of a false movement, it turned obliquely to the current, and in a short time the rear was even with the forward part. Impelled by the force of the water against its entire breadth, the enormous mass ran against the front of one of the piers of the Pont-Royal. Fortunately the three men who were on the raft were able to jump in time into a boat which was hurried to their assistance. They had scarcely set foot in the life-boat, when the raft crashed against the pier, and

was crumbled in the twinkling of an eye. The thousands of logs which composed it were scattered in the current, and were carried down the stream, where they were seen floating and turning round and round in the distance like mere corks.

Rafts of sawed wood are formed like those of firewood. The boards brought from the sawmill to the port of embarkation, where their whiteness makes a gay contrast with the green grass on the banks, are usually four or six metres long. They are formed crosswise, and they make the width of a coupon called *éclusée* or *brelle*. When the *brelle* is once constructed, the stones which held it on the inclined plane are removed, and it glides slowly towards the water, where the *éclusées* which are to form the raft are collected.

When the river is bordered by a tow-path, or when the raft navigates a canal, it is guided by means of a cable fastened obliquely to the *brelle*, and which is drawn by a horse, or sometimes even by the driver's wife, who thus does the work of a beast of burden, and takes her way along the bank with bowed head, her chest cut by the strap at the end of the cable, and her back strained.

The drivers lead a wandering life, partly on land

and partly on the water. Sometimes the entire household is established on the raft of wood, at one end of which they build a small hut, containing all the utensils necessary to domestic life. The wife and children squat on the boards, and do their cooking there, while the driver of the draught-horse cracks his whip, and a wolf-dog runs barking along the boards laid side by side.

In the early dawn the horse is harnessed ; and, to the sound of the whip cracking in the morning air, the raft of wood moves gently between the wet banks of the river or canal. In the green water, still dark, the trees on the shore, alders and poplars, are clearly reflected ; swallows fly swiftly past with a little cry, and with the tips of their black wings graze the water, which is suddenly covered with a shimmer of silver. A dewy coolness falls from the arch of trees ; the penetrating odor of meadowsweet is exhaled from the slopes ; and from the distant villages scattered in the valley the sound of the *angelus* comes across the fields. Sometimes the raft passes along by the borders of a deep wood full of the warblings of birds, sometimes it passes almost on a level with the meadows where they are mowing, or by fields of ripening wheat. Then

they come to a lock, the massive doors of which open with a heavy noise, and the raft is at the very bottom of the channel, between two high walls of stone where the water comes bubbling in; the raft rises, rises slowly under the impetus of the water which breaks against the walls, and finds itself once more on a level with the green banks, between which it quietly continues its journey.

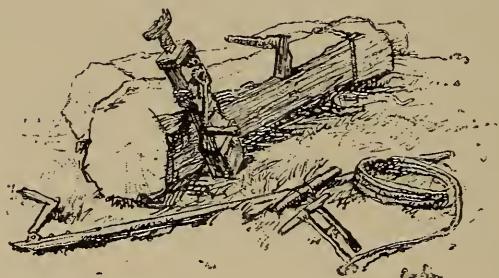
There are the vine-clad hills which lift their verdant shoulders against the blue sky, their villages nestling at the foot of the vineyards; they hear the crowing cocks, the children's cries, the noisy teams rolling over the roads, while the raft continues to pass silently down with the flowing water. The sun falls perpendicularly on the sparkling river, the hour of noon sounds from a tower which rises among the trees, and the driver's wife, who has made the soup on a fire burning at the stern of the raft, gives the children and men their dinner. Sometimes, on the side of a hill, a white town displays its tiled or slated roofs, its convents, its barracks, and its churches; on the banks the people walk gravely, reading their daily papers; motionless fishermen in the grass bend over their rod of reeds; the washer-

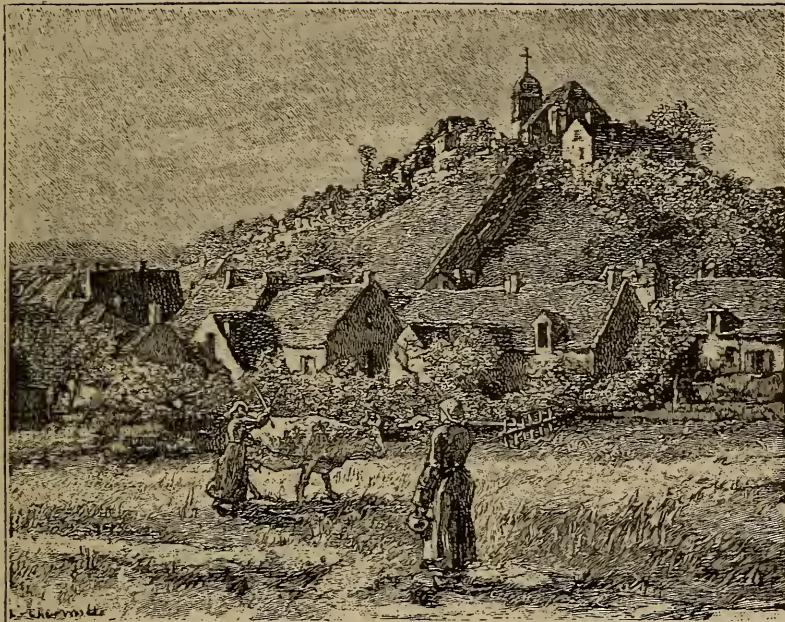
women beat their linen in the soapy water; then the silhouette of the town disappears behind the poplars, and they are in the open country again, and so on, until at nightfall the first stars are mirrored in the dark water. Then they stop at some riverside inn, unharness the horse, and the whole family go to sleep.

But with the first dawn of light the next day the raft begins its silent journey again, between the banks white with dew, and new landscapes, new horizons, show their fleeting perspectives among the trees. Suddenly, at the last lock, the body of water expands. It is no longer a modest stream bordered with poplars with their trembling leaves; it is a great river, with bare banks, far apart, where steam-boats ply up and down the stream, where freight ships come and go, and boats rowed by oarsmen in fantastic costumes gayly pass. On the horizon, in a cloud of thick reddish smoke, are seen high buildings and church-towers; then the raft gets entangled among the populous wharves bordered with houses five stories high, and passes under great bridges with monumental arches. The whistling of steam-engines, the rolling of carriages, the noise of a ceaselessly changing throng, is accentuated and

increases, while on each bank sumptuous palaces display their colonnades and sculptured friezes.

This is Paris; and the modest raft of boards, still fragrant with the smell of the woods where it was born, comes to take its place, almost unnoticed, beside the sunny wharf, among the boats coming and going, where a crowd of lightermen swarm.





THE VILLAGE.

O MY village! o'er the green
Meadows seen
Rising on the graceful hillside,
Where thy houses, old and brown,
Snuggle down
By the sage-and-mint-lined rill-side.

Perfumes of the olden days
Haunt thy ways,
And thy sheds decayed and broken.
Many a quaint ancestral word
Here is heard,
Where thy rude, strong dialect's spoken !

On thy "Square" a linden lone
Long has grown ;
'Neath its shade the school rejoices,
Where with noisy rhythmic hum
Children come,
Lifting happy, careless voices

Then thy pretty winding street
Climbs to meet,
On the hill, the church, whose steeple
Bends its weather-beaten face
On the "Place,"
Where in summer dance the people.

Hence the *angelus* sends its sound
Leagues around ;
Thrice a day on breezes carried.
Since the earliest days, I ween,
Here have been
Children christened, lovers married.

Death, too, has his share. . . . Here rest—
Worst and best—
All our kin, 'neath waving grasses
Youth and age lie side by side.
None abide !
Thus each generation passes !





XXII.

THE VILLAGE CHILDREN.

IF life in the village is made hard for the wife and husband, on the contrary, it is singularly sweet and joyful for the children,— for those called the “little folk.” The children of cities, shut up in the unventilated houses of the populous suburbs, imprisoned in narrow apartments in the quarters of the rich, restrained by too correct and often too elegant dress, only occasionally know the joys of a free life in the open air. The little boys in the



village, on the contrary, spend their days out-of-doors from the time they can walk. Their dress does not restrain them in the least! No straps, no corsets nor shoes. A coarse linen shirt, patched trousers, a petticoat full of holes,—this forms the basis of their wardrobe for every-day wear. Bare-headed, or wearing a ragged straw hat, barefooted, or with wooden shoes, they take their flight in the early morning. Even their rags have a fascination in the open air and light. They make them look more picturesque; their blouses or skirts, so frayed, worn, and faded, have an amusing variety of shades.

From four to eight years, that is, up to the time when school opens its door to them, almost all the village children enjoy complete liberty. They play to their hearts' content on the doorsteps and by the side of the road. Everything serves for amusement; and they are not difficult to please in the choice of playthings,—a bundle of rags rudely shaped takes the place of a doll; a piece of board with a string fastened to it becomes a wagon, which the little one drags seriously after him. Then all the field creatures are their playfellows; they live in brotherly intimacy with the ladybirds, with their round elytra dotted with black spots, with the red catherinettes

of the lilies, and especially with the cockchafers. They make cages of platted rushes in which they keep grasshoppers. I knew one boy who, with fatherly care, raised a toad which he had tamed, and it would come jumping clumsily to be fed by him when the scamp whistled in a certain way.

The entire country, at all seasons of the year, serves as a playground to the village children. Even in midwinter they find means for noisy plays. When the snow falls thick on the roads, all the youngsters come out-doors, and take childish delight in wallowing in the white drifts. They plunge into it, and play about in it like puppies. A snowball started by one of them, and growing larger and larger as they roll it over, soon attracts the whole band. The ball increases in size amid their childish shouts of glee, and at last becomes an enormous sphere, so voluminous that the united efforts of the little fellows fail to stir it. It remains in the same spot, as immovable as a monolith, and is kept intact until the next thaw.

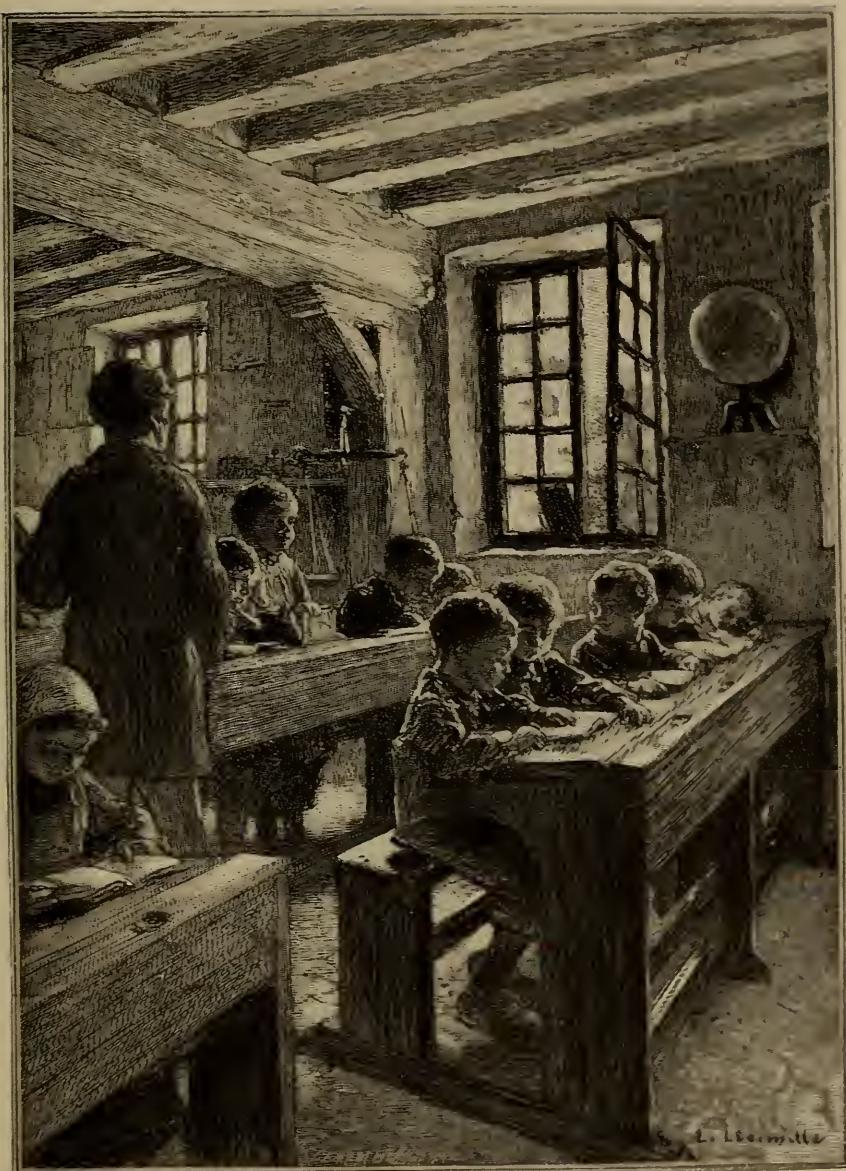
All day long till nightfall they slide on the ice-covered brooks, and coast down the streets on the hillsides on improvised sleds. An old board, fastened to a pair of wooden shoes by a piece of twine,

is used by the most ingenious to go from the top to the bottom of the slide. Those who are less inventive can only crouch on their heels, and, impelled by their own weight, slide over the inclined plane, the roughness of which causes them to lose a notable part of the seats of their breeches. Sometimes the sleds follow each other so closely in line that the least shock causes them to run off the track, and the crowd of coasters are upset all at once, head over heels into the snow; but the pleasure is none the less keen, and the north wind quickly dries the tears of those who are hurt the most.

With their eighth year, this life of freedom in the fields is limited by the duties of catechism and school. However, many children avoid imprisonment in school as long as possible, and do not begin regular attendance until the time to prepare for the first communion. Moreover, the period for *schooling* used to be restricted to the winter months; and with the first sunny spring days, the majority of children returned to their vagabond life out-of-doors. But now that instruction has become obligatory, schools for girls and boys are more seriously and assiduously attended. At eight o'clock in the morning, in winter as well as summer, the children from the hamlets

and farms scattered over the territory of the parish are seen on the roads leading to the borough. The boys and girls, in sabots or heavy boots, walk noisily along, with their books and copybooks in bags or under their arms. Mixed schools, where children of both sexes work in common under the eye and rule of a master, have become more and more rare; and in a great number of villages the school for girls and that for boys occupy separate places in the vicinity of the town hall and the church.

As one passes the school-buildings, in fine weather one hears from a distance, through the open windows, a hum of voices repeating the lessons or spelling words, while the grave, clear voice of the master or instructress measures off the monotonous murmuring, and occasionally interrupts it with a blow of the ruler on the corner of a desk. In passing, one catches a swift glimpse of the interior of the school,—the whitewashed walls, the geographical maps and alphabetical charts hanging on the walls; the teacher on his platform; and the black wooden desks, where rows of heads of boys or girls are bent over in attitudes of study or idleness, and are all lifted in perfect unison to



THE VILLAGE SCHOOL.

look at the passer-by, who brings them a moment of diversion.

In my time any inclination to talk or play was severely repressed with the help of ingeniously varied punishments; first there was the simple kneeling in a corner of the room, then kneeling with the arms folded, then the ruler thrown by the master at the offender, who was obliged to bring it back in his extended hand; after which the master would apply it with a will to his fingers, and send him back to his place. Sometimes the ruler would fall between two delinquents, and then it was a question who should return it. "It is not for me, it is for you," one would whisper to the other. "Go along yourself!" — "No, he is looking at you!" and the argument would come to an end, when the master, in an angry voice, would call out, "Both of you come here, and quickly too!" I believe that since that remote period things have not much changed, and that the penal code in school is still the same. Always the most dreaded punishment is to be kept in school after the regular hours.

Eleven o'clock strikes. At a sign from the master or the instructress, the whole school rises, and scat-

ters noisily outside. The boys turn somersaults as they pass out, and scamper into the street with a merry noise. The girls more quiet, or already more reserved, go out without so much commotion, and sign themselves religiously as they pass the church. No one is left in the schoolrooms but the unfortunate ones who have talked too loud, or have not learned their lessons. Deprived of their play, they spend their leisure in sprinkling and sweeping the schoolhouse, and through the wide open windows they cast distressful looks at their companions outside; while the latter, without the least charity,—“this age is pitiless,”—redouble their play under the very eyes of the unfortunate prisoners.

But in spite of being detained and the six hours of school every day, the children in the village have many good full hours of liberty. There are the holidays on Thursday, Sunday afternoons when vespers are said, and, above all, there are the vacations at Easter and in September. Then the little peasant gives full sway to his taste for rambling and marauding; then he is intoxicated with fresh air, verdure, and sunshine. What whistles are cut in April from willow twigs moist with sap! what nests discovered, and removed from their nooks in

the hedges, and from the crotch of lofty branches,—all to the detriment of blouses and trousers! In the autumn vacation all the little people from the villages are in the fields. The little girls run through the thickets to gather mulberries and nuts; the boys collect in some pasture on the edge of a wood, and, under pretext of watching five or six cows intrusted to their care, laugh and play with all their might.

They play *gaille* or *bisquinette*, rough, rustic games, which have a distant analogy to the English game of cricket. They light fires of brushwood, under the coals of which they roast potatoes. In place of dessert they eat their fill of all the wild fruits and vegetables which can be gathered from the branches or pulled out of the ground. There is no botanist or hunting-dog whose scent is comparable to that of children for finding underground plants or roots good to eat. Nothing escapes them: the viper's grass in the meadow, the *macreuses* or water chestnuts, the tuberous vetch, known under the name of *mécusons*, and which bears the same relation to the truffle as the wild plum to the green gage. The robust stomachs of the little peasants digest all this crude fare without the least incon-

venience. They swallow cornelian cherries, huckleberries, and wood strawberries, washing down the sylvan collation with spring water. Nor until dusk do they return to the village, whistling like blackbirds, and cracking their whips deliberately as they drive the restive cows before them; while the little girls, sitting on the steps knitting stockings, watch them as they pass by, with eyes of admiration and envy. They go home to their parents with their clothes in holes, make a supper of a piece of bread, and go to bed on their straw pallets, where they sleep soundly.

And this merry life begins again the next day, until the gray days of October, when they go to school again. With this routine their bodies develop, their muscles harden, and their intelligence is not left behind. The instruction now so widespread in the country does not fall on sterile ground. These simple, strong, healthy organizations when submitted to intellectual culture give surprising results; and more than one little peasant boy could teach grammar, history, and mathematics to many a little bourgeois of my acquaintance.

If the educators of these new hotbeds of learning were wise, they would say to their pupils, "Stay

in the village, and apply the knowledge you have acquired to rural life."

Unfortunately the children have seen how hard their fathers work, and are tempted by the apparently more comfortable life led in the cities. They even dream of entering some office and becoming government employees. Their parents, dazzled by the prospect of transforming their boys into gentlemen, do not dissuade their offspring from these ambitious aims ; on the contrary, they urge them to leave the fields. So it happens that the country is gradually becoming depopulated, and the number of the unclassed increases in the great centres. The girls who are growing up, and whose youthful forms are beginning to round out under their waists which have become too narrow, the girls dream of changing their work and living in the large cities, where they can exchange their head-dresses and petticoats for stylish hats and ready-made clothes. The most ambitious wish to become school-teachers or shop-girls ; the humbler ones think of hiring out as servants or ladies' maids. Thus, while youth is succeeding childhood, thoughts of emigration are taking shape under the young girl's jacket, as well as beneath the *gachenet's* blouse ; and all have but

one desire,—to change the free life of the country, which has always been so sweet for them, for a strange, confined condition in which their bodies and souls will wither away in servitude.





XXIII.

THE PATRON SAINT'S DAY.



IN the course of the peasant's long, laborious life he has but few days of pleasure. He rarely breaks into his habits of frugality and industry, except to go to a wedding, or when the patron saint's day of his village comes. This festival, which takes place but once a year, is an event in the peasant's life. On this day he invites his friends or his relatives in the neighborhood to his house. In strict communities, where the priest still preserves his authority, and tries to protect his parishioners from the temptations of the Evil One,

it is the only day when dancing is allowed. So in each province this day of idleness, amusement, and feasting is known under a special name; it is the *ducasse* in the north, the *kirb* in German Lorraine, the *rappoart* in the eastern departments, the *vogue* in the Dauphiny and Savoy, the *assemblée* in Tourania and Berry, the *ballade* in Poitou, the *frairie* in Saintonge and in Angoumois, the *fête votive* in the south, and the *pardon* in Brittany.

In the less religious countries it still preserves the name of the patron saint under whose protection the parish is placed. A long time beforehand preparations are made for a suitable celebration. For this occasion the girls reserve their smartest dress, and the boys secretly hoard their savings in the bottom of their purses. During the week preceding the holiday the housekeepers are busy in the kitchen. Ovens blaze; and in every house the women, with their arms bare to the elbow, their faces powdered with flour, are seen kneading and rolling the dough to make all sorts of dainties. The day before, every house exhales an appetizing odor of pastry, which dilates the children's nostrils, and makes their mouths water in anticipation.

On the previous evening mountebanks and ped-

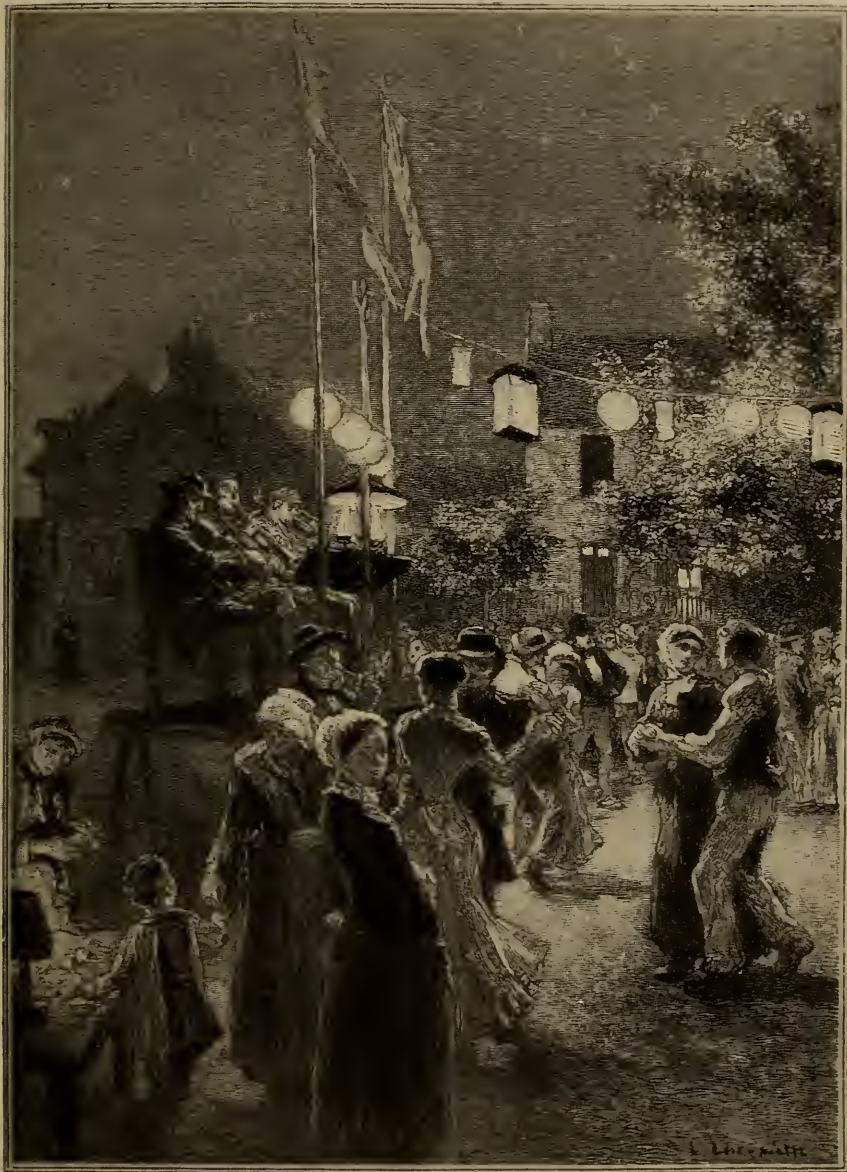
lers set up their stalls and booths in the public square. At night every one sleeps uneasily, dreaming of the feasting and amusements to take place the next day. As soon as the day dawns they are awakened by the ringing of bells, and every one jumps out of bed in high glee. The peasant shaves himself, puts on a white shirt, and dons his new blouse or his old wedding coat; the girls stand a long time before the mirror, and, after a good hour, finally appear in all the finery of a new dress, silk fichu, and best head-dress. They stand very erect in their stiff, starched skirts, and walk slowly in their creaking shoes which pinch their feet.

Men, women, and children, everybody in fact, goes to high mass on this day. The church is crowded with people, sitting and standing; and those who are late, and find no room, overflow on the steps at the entrance. In spite of this religious fervor, the congregation is nervous and distracted. They listen impatiently to the priest's sermon, recommending the men to keep sober, and very uselessly urging the girls to refrain from dancing and other profane pleasures. At last the officiating priest mumbles the last prayer. Then the crowd noisily pass out of the church, and the majority of

the people hasten to the square, where the firemen parade, where the booths display their goods, and the mountebanks begin their shows.

Everything is found collected there to excite the cupidity of a simple population, unspoiled by luxury. Pedlers unpack their boxes in the open air, and morning caps, cotton lace, many-colored ribbons, swing on strings at the least breeze, while the girls, with shining eyes and outstretched necks, crowd eagerly around the display, fingering the ribbons, examining the strips of lace, and bargaining for the caps.

In the corner formed by the town hall and the church, a somnambulist foretells the future, behind the curtains of his long green wagon; in front, a photographer, under his linen tent, gives for a franc, frame included, an instantaneous photograph, the likeness of which is guaranteed; standing in a gilded barouche, an extractor of teeth, beating a big drum and cymbals, calls for "amateurs" desirous of having a molar pulled out. The children, with wide-open eyes, anxiously fingering the sous dancing in the bottom of their pockets, walk undecidedly from the booth where sweets are sold to the stall where hot waffles are offered.



THE VILLAGE FESTIVAL (AT EVENING).

All day long the inns are full of people. Sounds of loud singing come through every window; servants, carrying bottles, quickly ascend and descend the stairs, glasses jingle, and coarse bursts of laughter are mingled with shouting.

But it is especially in the evening, after dark, that the festival is at its height. Supper has brightened every face, and excited the most timid. Merry-go-rounds turn to the sounds of a snuffling organ, in a fantastic circle resplendent with lights, the brilliancy of which is increased by the reflection of looking-glasses and the glittering of spangles. The reports of the shooting mingle with the groaning of the organ and the creaking of the lottery-wheels. Rows of colored lights decorate the trees on the common, under which an orchestra gives forth explosive blasts. This is the signal for the open-air ball, and boys and girls hurry to the dancing-hall.

In certain provinces, in Berry, in Touraine, and in Poitou, the festival of the patron saint is also a place of reunion, an *assemblée* where the proprietors and farmers meet who wish to hire servant-maids, herdsmen, or men to work on the farm. In this case they are called *louées*. They usually take place in the daytime and in the open fields, sometimes

on the closely shaven grass of a pastur , or in the clearing of a wood. They have dancing all the afternoon. The boys or girls who wish to be engaged decorate their hats or their waists with a branch of leaves. This green twig of oak or broom announces their intentions. It says to the people: “See, I am strong, I have stout shoulders and arms, and I will willingly pledge you a year of my youth, if you will give me in exchange my board and clothing, with new sabots and a few ringing pistoles.”

The inn is there, on one side, waving invitingly its branch of pine or juniper. The farmers in search of servants stay there. The bargain is concluded over a bottle of wine. As soon as the engagements are made on both sides, and the retainers paid, the boys and girls go back to the dancing. The bagpipe squalls, and the hurdy-gurdy gives forth its shrill notes. Forward! And the quadrilles begin. Skirts fly in the air, waists are squeezed by strong arms. All are anxious to have one whole day more of pleasure before they begin their hard daily work. They drink to excess on this last day of liberty, and get over excited in order to forget the melancholy prospect of the next day.

To-morrow they must leave their native village

and its familiar scenes. They will have to go far away to the house of a stranger, and to work for strangers; to submit to all the caprices of their master, his wife, and his children; they will have to rise with the dawn, go to bed late in a loft next the stable, on a bed which will seem all the harder because it is the bed of servitude. How many times the boy or the girl, and especially the girl, will be seized with homesickness! How many times the joyful, distant accents of the bagpipe of their native land will sorrowfully sound again in the hearts of the little shepherd or of the maid-servant!

People do not realize sufficiently of what keen suffering the simple peasant souls are capable. When they are transplanted to a distance, homesickness stabs them and tortures them every hour in the day; when they are asleep, they see their village again in their dreams; and when they awake in the morning, and find themselves face to face with the stern reality of daily labor in a strange place, their grief bursts with violence, and their sorrow grows more keen.

I remember a little maid whom we had in a country town, and who, at the age of sixteen, had left an obscure village on the Meuse. She could

not adapt herself to her new condition ; and every morning when she awoke, thinking she was alone in the kitchen, she would burst into tears. She could not overcome it. She languished in exile like a swallow in a cage. Finally she fell sick, and had to be sent back to her native village. And even now I seem to hear the stifled sobs of the poor girl as she wept at daybreak every morning when she heard the *angelus*, and was reminded of the familiar sounds of the bell in her own parish.





X X I V.

BETROTHALS AND WEDDINGS.



THE village is the only place where a custom which is daily dying out, in France at least, can still be found,—that is the betrothal. While among the French bourgeoisie love-matches are becoming more and more rare, couples are quite frequently met with in the country who have been in love with each other before they were married. This shows that, especially in the poor countries, the true principle of marriage is unconsciously observed: the daughter is not sought on account of her dowry,

which is often very moderate ; and the boy does not marry until he is able through his own industry to support a wife and children. A greater liberty is allowed to the girls, who, having acquired by this means more serious ideas about their own responsibility, know better how to behave and defend themselves. Life in the open air, working together in the fields, leads necessarily to a more constant mingling of the two sexes. The boys and girls meet every day in the fields, in the evening at the *veillée*, and on Sunday at the ball ; they get better acquainted, and their mutual inclinations develop more freely. It occasionally happens, to be sure, that so much liberty has serious inconveniences ; but when things “turn out badly,” it is rare that the lad does not marry the girl. The public opinion of the village makes it almost a law that he shall repair with marriage the mischief he has caused.

The parents are not always consulted in regard to these inclinations brought about by long and continued association. They often make a violent opposition to their children’s choice ; but when the young people are really in love, they can manifest uncommon energy and strength of will in the contest. By dint of patience and obstinacy they end

by overcoming the resistance of the family, and by securing their choice.

In a village on the Meuse I knew a worthy farmer who had a daughter eighteen years old, very pretty and bright. She was in love with a young neighbor, whose only possession was his two arms, but who was very intelligent and very handsome. For two years the young people had “spoken” to each other: that is the expression used among us to indicate that a girl and a young man are in love with each other. The affair displeased the father, who did not hesitate to reprimand and scold his daughter. But he wasted his time. The young girl adored her lover, and he reciprocated her feelings; and they both knew how to seize every opportunity to meet and talk over their plans of marriage. The good man swore by all that was holy that he would never give his daughter to a man who did not even own a bit of land; on her side the girl swore that she would never have any other husband.

The father refusing his consent made the girl more obstinate in her love; and the conflict threatened to go on forever, when Mentine (that was the young peasant girl’s name) conceived the idea of eloping with her lover. She started away with him one

beautiful evening, and took refuge at a house of one of the young man's relatives, living in a neighboring village. The father was at first furious, and entered a complaint against the seducer; he wanted nothing less than to have the rascal condemned to the galleyes. The prosecuting attorney ordered the plaintiff and the offender to appear in his office. As soon as the father saw the youth, his anger knew no limits. "So it is you, wretch," he exclaimed, "who have led Mentine astray!"

"It is you," replied the other, "who wish to have your daughter die of grief!"

Whereupon he pleaded so touchingly with the farmer, that the father finally burst into tears, and threw himself into the lover's arms; and they both went out to the nearest town to fix the wedding-day, and drink a bottle of wine.

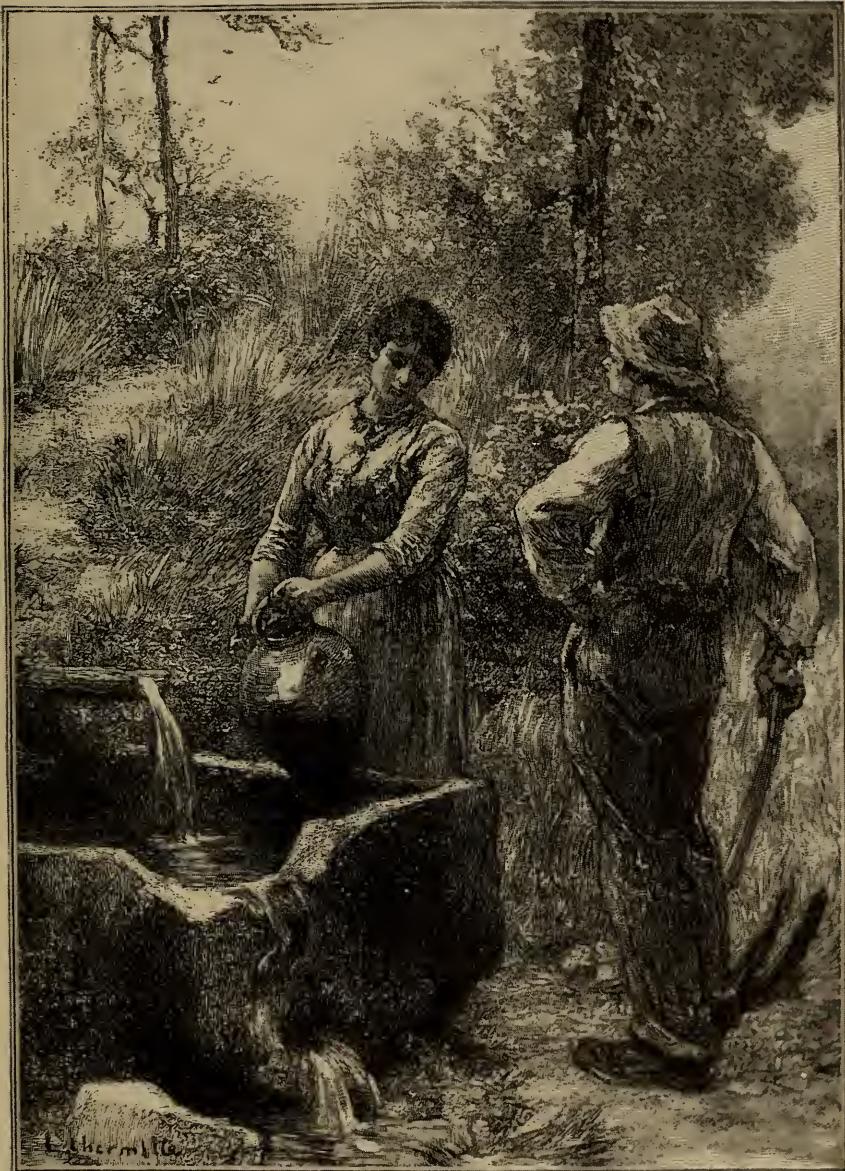
The engagement often lasts for years. The betrothed couple meet "to talk together" or do their courting morning and evening beside some convenient hedge, or in the shade of trees which overhang the washhouse. Their conversation is usually very laconic and reserved. They say nothing in particular; their whole pleasure consists in looking at each other and gently touching each other. Last autumn,

in Savoy, I myself witnessed one of these simple village idyls. About a hundred steps from my house, under some walnut-trees, there is a brook where the village people go to draw water for their household necessities. Every evening a young girl of seventeen used to come hastily down the path in the dusk, just as the angelus was ringing. She would hurry along, bareheaded, and carrying in one hand a wooden pail, and in the other a sort of long-handled copper basin with which she dipped up the water. At the same moment a young man who was mowing the aftermath would emerge from the shady meadows, and lean over the little wall by the brook, while the young girl knelt down and filled her bowl absentmindedly. She would take her time, and not start back up the path for a half hour, and then very slowly. Often the stars would be dancing above the mountains which frame the lake, and I would still hear the cool, intermittent sound of the water falling into her half-filled pail; this lasted through the entire season of the aftermath, and my lovers were married this year.

Village weddings are showy, noisy affairs. All the friends and relatives in the neighborhood are invited to be present, and in the bride's house they

are busy with preparations in the kitchen for at least a week beforehand. With us, the young people invited to the wedding usually pay the expenses of the violins and the refreshments for the ball. Each friend of the bride has an usher or gentleman of honor to escort her and perform the duties of partner throughout the entire festival. Besides, the usher offers his *Valentine* a pair of gloves, a knot of ribbon, and a bouquet of artificial flowers. As soon as the wedded pair leave the church, the young people fire a salute to them, then the musicians engaged for the dancing take their places at the head of the procession, and conduct the wedding party, with many a fol-de-rol, to the barn where the feast is served. All the gentlemen of the party wear favors with the bride's colors in the button-holes of their coats, and these favors are tied with ribbons also to the violins and clarinets of the players.

At the entrance of the house the young bridegroom and his bride stand on either side of the door. The bridegroom kisses all the women, and the bride all the men, in the party; then they go in a procession to the festal hall, decorated for this occasion with white flags, green branches, and bouquets of flowers.



AT THE SPRING.

The wedding feast is long and abundant. Stewed meats and roast birds, *pâtés* and fruit tarts, abound. The bride and groom are seated next each other at the head of the table; next them come the people of note and the old people. The young folk, girls and boys, are placed opposite; and this side of the table is especially noisy and gay. At the very end the little people find a place, the children and those of no consequence. At dessert one of the notables drinks the bride's health, and often sings an old-time song. This is the signal for a sort of musical interlude, when the ushers and the young girls who have voices take turns in singing sentimental songs.

Suddenly the door at the back of the room opens, and two or three old women — usually the servants who have cooked the wedding meal — enter solemnly, and intone the *bride's song*; after which, with a shoe or a sabot, they take up a collection to pay them for their trouble.

This *bride's song* is grave and melancholy, like the peasant's life itself. In the midst of the noise and laughter of the wedding celebration, it utters a profoundly sad and realistic note. It announces to the bride, from the midst of the festivities, what the occupations and troubles of married life will be: —

“ Vous n’irez plus au bal, madam’ la mariée,
 Vous voilà donc liée
 Avec un long fil d’or
 Qui ne rompt qu’à la mort.

Acceptez ce bouquet que ma main vous présente.
 C’est pour vous faire entendre.
 Que tous ces beaux honneurs
 Passeront comme fleurs.” . . .¹

A burst of music happily interrupts this sad complaint. The dancing begins, and is prolonged far into the night. The married couple do not wait until it is over. They steal away about eleven o’clock, and retire stealthily to some distant house, where they hope to pass the first night of their married life in peace.

But it is a vain precaution! The secret of their flight is soon discovered. Their friends begin to search for the room where they are hiding, and

¹ “No more shall you go to the ball, Madam wife!
 All the days of your life
 A long golden thread
 Binds you fast till you’re dead.

Accept this bouquet then, I pray, from my hand!
 You will now understand
 That these gay happy hours
 Turn to dust like the flowers!” . . .

they always find it. About one o'clock in the morning the report of a gun tells them that their retreat is discovered, and the whole wedding-party rush into the chamber to offer "white soup" to the newly wedded pair.





X X V.

FAMILY LIFE.



WHEN the tree has put forth all its buds, opened all its blossoms, it gathers its energy and its organism — exerts all its efforts to changing the flowers into fruit. For the peasant to marry is to become fruitful. So he hastens to establish himself; although for both sexes marriage necessarily puts a limit to the feverish pleasures of youth, and opens a series of serious, anxious days, consecrated to trouble and hard work. In this new

phase of country life, woman's lot is much less favorable; she is obliged to work as hard as the man, and often harder.

"Ah! our Zabeth is a good wife," said a farmer to me one day; "she has had a great deal of misfortune in her life, and she has done more work than two horses!"

This is the highest praise that a peasant can give his wife; for he usually holds his horses in great esteem, and is more willing to call the veterinary surgeon to his house than a doctor. In Lorraine there is a proverb which in its laconic severity says much in regard to the condition of the married peasant woman:—

"Mort de femme et vie de cheveau
Tirent l'homme haut."¹

For the wife there is scarcely ever a moment's rest after the week she is married. Children come: she must suffer to bring them into the world, and suffer to bring them up. So all the rustic songs which speak of marriage and its worries have a cruel realism and eloquence about them. As in the love-songs the language is embellished with

¹ If the wife dies and the horse lives,
Great profit to the man it gives.

tender, delicate images, so in the songs treating of conjugal life it is brutal and coarse.

One says: —

“ L'époux que vous prenez
Sera toujours le maître;
Ne sera toujours doux
Ainsi qu'il devait l'être,
Mais pour le radoucir,
Faudra lui obeir.² . . .

And this other is still less attractive: —

“ At the end of a year, a baby you see,
Then life seems bright and jolly!
At the end of two years, two babies may be,
So enters melancholy!

At the end of three years, three children mayhap,
The very devil's to pay then!
The eldest wants bread, and the next one wants pap,
Oh, what shall the poor mother say then?

The baby is hungry, and cries night and day,
But the breast is shrivelled and shrunk!
With his cronies the father is ever away,
And often and often is drunk!

² Your husband, you will find,
Will manage to control you!
Will not be always kind,
There's nothing to console you!
But try to let him have his way,
And see that you obey. . . .

The mother alone in the house is watching,
And weeps and groans evermore." . . .

CHANSON DE LA SAINTONGE.

And yet in spite of this cruel fate the woman accepts her suffering with courageous resignation, just as she accepts, without much rebellion, the brutality and despotism from her husband. She likes to find a master in her husband; she prefers to be beaten, rather than to have to deal with a spouse without energy. As soon as she sees that their *rôles* have been exchanged, and that she rules her husband, she despises him, and from scorn to infidelity she makes but one step. However, it is just to say, that, in the country, infidelity of the wife is rare; and when it is met with, it is usually caused by neglect or abuse on the part of the husband.

Care should be taken not to judge the peasant by exceptions; that is, from criminal or immoral deeds which break out at long intervals, and are revealed to us by the police court or the court of assizes. The masters of the contemporary naturalistic school have a too marked tendency to take these exceptional documents for the general character and the ordinary conditions of country life. They depict

the peasant after the inhabitant of the villages in the suburbs of Paris, or according to observations gathered from the *Police Gazette*; and they not only paint him brutal, hard to himself and to others, but they represent him as a cynically cruel being, loose and sensual, and capable of every impropriety and every villainy. To those who have lived in the village, and studied the peasant attentively and impartially, this is only an unfair caricature.

In the first place, although his education is very imperfect, his exterior animal-like, the peasant, like all hard-working people, is chaste and continent in reality. He is sensual and gluttonous in a certain measure, but he is not corrupt. Although his treatment of his children is harsh, he loves them, and concerns himself with them as much as city people. He even has a high degree of respect for children; he guards his actions and words before the little people far more scrupulously than many a bourgeois of my acquaintance. To be sure, he does not always use the choicest language, and he often lets slip more than one coarse word; but the round, energetic oaths, which sound so violent and shock the ears of us city people, have not the same importance in the mouths of the rough tillers of the soil.

They do not utter them with any premeditation, but almost unconsciously, and attach no obscene meaning to them. Their ways of speaking are no more an indication of depravity in the peasant, than the fact of lifting their skirts above the knee is a sign of immodesty among the women who fish for shrimps on our coasts in Brittany and Normandy.

Under his wrinkled skin, the man who lives in contact with the earth has a sensibility as keen as the inhabitant of the city. He loves, suffers, and gets angry like the rest of humanity. But he is endowed with a greater amount of patience, and expresses his feelings more soberly. He is not an easy speaker; but what he says he always says simply, and usually in a graphic manner. He is not fond of grand phrases or rhetoric; he does not know how to analyze his sensations or his emotions; but in his brief remarks he almost always finds an exact and picturesque expression. The spectacles of nature move him to exclamations of admiration or pity, which, if not translated into academic language, are none the less expressive, none the less eloquent.

After the war, during the gloomy days of the Commune, I was walking sadly over one of the

great bare plains of Barrois. Above my head, and not far from two peasants who were hoeing, a lark warbled as he flew upward. One of the two men hoeing, lifted his eyes, and exclaimed in a tone which touched me, "Poor little lark, how he sings!" This exclamation seemed to express a sort of melancholy surprise at hearing this bird's sweet song again after so many misfortunes.

Not only is the peasant susceptible to delicate emotions, but he is a poet in his way. If the provincial language is carefully studied, one is very much surprised and delighted to be constantly discovering ingenious, striking, glowing images. If there is a fresh breeze blowing, the peasant will tell you that "the weather is *gay*;" if it is muggy and cloudy, "the weather is *sick*." In Touraine the women who have received a marriage settlement say that their husband "has paid them for their youth." No poet is more ready than the peasant to personify inanimate objects. "This land does not yield anything," said a farmer to me one day; "it is not *grateful*."

One day in Savoy I was looking at the mountains all white with the first fall of snow. "Are they not beautiful, these mountains of ours," said



FAMILY LIFE.

a serving-maid to me as she passed by; “they will become still more so, now that the sun *is smiling on the snow.*”

The men who naturally invent such picturesque expressions have certainly nothing in common with the coarse creatures and brutes depicted by the superficial studies of the naturalistic school. The peasant is thoroughly sober and frugal. In the country those people who are in the habit of getting drunk or gormandizing are scorned. Feast days in the countryman’s life come but rarely.

The daily meals have a primitive simplicity. In most of the provinces, bread, milk, potatoes, and bacon form even at the present time the customary diet. When I was a child, even in the comfortable villages on the Meuse meat was not eaten except on Sunday. I have often been present at the farmers’ or day-laborers’ evening meal, when they have just returned from the fields. It was composed solely of bread and cheese, or in summer a salad of lettuce dressed with cream. The man and wife, still covered with dust from their day’s work, would sit down with their children around the large, square, heavy table, called with us the dresser. They would eat slowly and leisurely; then the wife

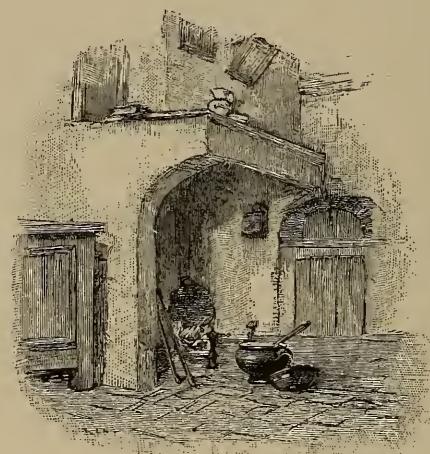
would set away the dishes, and put the youngest children to bed; the man smoked his pipe or read the almanac, in winter in the chimney-corner, and in summer on the doorstep; the wife mended her clothes or the children's; and when the curfew rang from the church, they stretched themselves out on the large bed, with its red or yellow canopy, standing in a sort of alcove at the back of the kitchen.

The peasant possesses another virtue; that is economy. No one understands better than he does how to save, and the wife is still more parsimonious than her husband. To them a sou is a sou, and they do not let it go readily. This parsimony even degenerates into avarice, and gives the countryman a hardness which sometimes makes him cruel. But more than money he loves land, or rather he used to love it passionately. Now that produce sells so low, and the cereals and grapevines do not yield as large crops as formerly, he has unfortunately grown a little indifferent. But it is only an accidental indifference,—a sort of lovers' quarrel; and two or three fruitful years would quickly bring the peasant back to his first and only love,—the earth.

To the farmer born and bred in the country, the earth is a mistress coddled and passionately adored. The peasant owes everything to it,—his comfort, his joys, his virtues, and also his vices. It is love for the earth which makes his marriage fruitful; for he is anxious to have a great many children around him, in order to economize in hiring day-laborers. It is the same love which makes him the first to rise, the last to go to bed, and keeps him running about in the rain or sunshine; but it also suggests to the farmer his suspicions, his craftiness, his cowardly acts, and his crimes. Ploughs overturned in a neighbor's field, displacement of boundaries, fraud towards the treasury, horror of military service, even sometimes a cowardly horror, anticipated inheritances taken by violence from aged parents,—these are some of the sad consequences of this idolatrous worship of the earth.

However, if the medal has another side, it is nevertheless of pure and priceless metal. As a young farmer said to me one day in a moment of enthusiasm, “The peasants are the masters of the world!” Surely he who makes the earth fertile, and provides nourishment for all society, is truly the king of that society. In France, at the present

time, it is from among the homes of the peasantry that the best-tempered characters, the most persevering energy, the brightest and most robust intelligences spring. The day when cultivation of the soil shall be disdained among us, will be the *ultima dies*; and we shall be able to say, on that day, that it is all over with France. The peasant family, with all its rudeness, its coarseness, and defects, is still the most lively and healthy element of present society; and it is in the cultivation of the soil, in the out-door country life, that the French bourgeoisie will henceforth find its renewal and welfare.

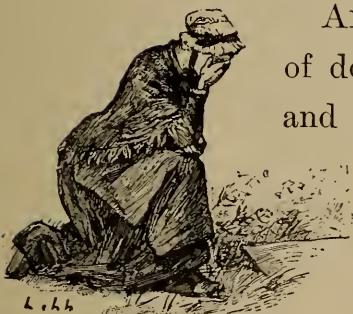




XXVI.

OLD AGE AND DEATH.

AFTER the trials and tribulations of domestic life, come the infirmities and absurdities of old age. The peasant regards old people as useless beings. Old age does not seem to him as a period of rest and serenity, but as a time of failings and sickness. So the popular songs are pitiless towards the aged. They lash and ridicule unequal marriages unmercifully, when lovesick old women marry young men, or old men have bought with ready money the youth of a



smart, lively wife. When the children become mature, strong men, it does not take them long to look upon their old father and mother as useless beings. From the time when the parents are no longer strong enough to till the land, they are almost refused the right to remain on it. The children count impatiently on the time when, according to a brutal saying in Savoy, "they will go to take care of the priest's hens;" that is, to live in the cemetery next the priest's house and the church.

The civil law, by giving the father and mother great freedom in resigning their property during their lifetime in favor of their children, has only encouraged this scorn of old age; and it has unfortunately tended in the country to weaken the authority of the parents. As soon as the latter begin to grow old, the children give them no peace until they have consented to a division of the property. The old people resist as well as they can; they hold on to their lands, and declare that they shall die prematurely if they give them up. But the importunity increases in direct proportion to the resistance. The children represent to the old parents that their fields are spoiling, that they

have a right to take a rest which they have painfully earned, and that they will be a hundred times happier when they are quietly enjoying an income paid to them by their children. They coax and scold in every way; they pass successively from wheedling to threats, from sulkiness to fine promises. At last the old people, tired of quarrelling and discussing, decide to sign the papers at the lawyer's office, and to give their property into the hands of their future heirs.

Generally the donors reserve the use of the whole or a part of their home, and stipulate, besides, for a life pension in money or in kind, to be paid to them by each of the donees. Some, who are less prudent, give up even the use of their house, and consent to live with each of their children in turn. At first all goes well; they are fondled and spoiled. But the peasant soon fails to have any regard for those who no longer own the land. The annuity is gradually paid more irregularly; a home is given them with a bad grace; they are reduced to bare necessities; and the poor old people are relegated to some cold, fireless room, where they are not as well off as the creatures in the stable. If they live too long, their persistent health is looked upon with

displeasure and impatience; if they become infirm, if they grow childish, then it is worse; they long to have them die, and sometimes even hasten their death.

There is not a year when the courts do not repress in the country the ill treatment of unfortunate old people dependent upon the care of their children. Sometimes, but more rarely, in certain out-of-the-way and half-civilized places, the desire to be relieved of "useless mouths" leads the peasants to commit crimes aggravated by odious, heart-rending details. Such is the end of a martyrdom, which often lasts for long years, and for which the legislation allowing anticipated division of property is largely responsible. Oftentimes, moreover, the old man, treated like an outcast, longs for death, as he looks from his garret windows on the land which he has so often cultivated, which he has loved so passionately, and which is no longer his.

The peasant sees death approach without great emotion, and with a calmer eye than the approach of old age. Young or old, men or women, they welcome the *reaper* with the stoical indifference of animals. All the rustic songs bear the trace of this serenity before the fatal, mysterious act of annihi-

lation. The soldier who has fought for six whole hours, and is brought back wounded, replies, when asked if he is sorry to die:—

“Tout le regret que j'ai au monde
C'est de mourir sans voir ma blonde.”¹

The young girl shows the same resignation:—

“Elle est près de mourir,
Encore elle me regarde ;
Elle a tiré
Sa main blanche du lit,
Pour dire adieu à son ami.”²

The girl condemned to be hanged for infanticide, and on her way to the gallows, “the priest before her, the hangman behind,” faces her punishment calmly, and her last words to her mother have a grandeur almost Shakespearian:-

“Ma mère, coupez mes blonds cheveux,
Et pendez-les devant l'église ;
Ils serviront d'exemple aux filles.”³ . . .

¹ I die : but all my deep regret, my pain.
Is ne'er to see my love again.

² She is almost dying now,
She gives me one last look ;
She slowly draws
Her white hand from the bed,
And thus her last farewell is said.

³ Mother, cut off my flaxen curls,
And hang them up before the church ;
They'll serve to warn the other girls. . . .

The idea of death almost never awakens an exclamation of terror in these elementary natures. One thought alone disturbs and horrifies them,— hell, the fear of seeing the ghosts of those who have died without confession. So in the country the dead are the object of a superstitious and fervent worship.

As soon as a peasant dies and is laid out, his house is open to everybody during the night and day preceding the burial. The whole village files into the chamber of death, and mumbles an *oremus* there, sprinkling the deceased with a branch of boxwood dipped in holy water. This devout procession, often formed as much through curiosity as interest, continues far into the night. The deceased is watched over by relatives and old women, who lay out the corpse, and serve as mourners. These women take turns in watching near the body; crouching in the large kitchen fireplace, they keep up their strength and drive away miasm by preparing warm wine, which they drink, muttering regrets and eulogies addressed to the deceased.

With us these funereal discourses, somewhat analogous to the Corsican *voceri*, but much more prosaic, consist in quite commonplace formulas,

which are repeated at every funeral ceremony : “ Ah ! the poor, dear friend, the poor fellow, how soon he went ! He did not have time to see his own death. . . . Ah ! the poor, dear, darling creature ! . . . Holy Mother of God ! who would have thought that I should be weeping at his funeral ? ” . . . etc.

The body is borne to the church and to the cemetery. If it is a young girl, the coffin is escorted by her companions, dressed in white, veiled, and carrying a wax taper. If the deceased is a youth or married man, the ceremony is the same, but with a masculine escort, wearing crape on the arm or on their hats.

After the religious service and the burial, the relatives, the friends, and even the acquaintances of the deceased are invited to the house of mourning to a repast called the *obit*. This funeral repast begins solemnly and silently ; but as the courses follow each other, and the bottles are emptied, the conversation grows louder and more animated. At dessert the oldest of the guests rises, and intones the *de profundis* to the memory of the departed. It is not uncommon for the *obit* to degenerate into drinking and feasting unworthy of the circum-

stances, and very disagreeable to the truly afflicted relatives. So in many well-to-do families, instead of the *obit*, a sum of money is distributed among the village people who have followed the procession. Mourning for the dead is worn very strictly, and for long weeks the house of the deceased remains plunged in respectful silence. Often even the shepherd, whistling on his way home from the pasture, stops his tune as he passes the house where some one has died, and does not begin again until he has gone the length of the street from the place where death has recently entered.

Then, on the anniversary of a death, they never fail to have a special service in church for the repose of the deceased friend's soul, independently of the masses which some pious families have said periodically. But it is especially during the week of All Saints, and particularly on the day before this festival, that the village pays homage to its dead. On this day the entire population of the living take their way along the path to the cemetery, and the green grass growing around the graves is crowded with women in mourning piously kneeling. These graves, grouped in the shadow of the church, are more or less cared for according to the provinces.

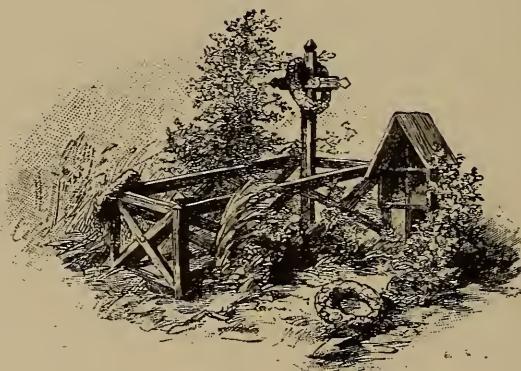


COMMEMORATION OF THE DEPARTED.

In the east it is not uncommon to see them covered with flowers like a garden. In Brittany, along the coast, they are often surrounded with a graceful border of shells. In Cornouailles, on large slabs laid on the top of the mounds, they hollow out a sort of shallow cup into which the women pour milk. With us, in the country near the Meuse, they bring branches of boxwood, blessed on Palm Sunday, and called *pâquottes*, to the graves of the deceased, on the anniversary of their death. A woman never fails to plant these *pâquottes* on the grave of her husband or child.

The chestnut-trees and lindens in the cemeteries scatter their last yellow leaves on the grass already destroyed by the first frost; the autumn birds—red-breasts, blackbirds, and tomtits—sing softly in the branches of the fir-trees; the Palm Sunday branches of boxwood, the rustic *pâquottes*, gathered in the early spring when all nature was awake and in bloom, have just turned yellow in the November wind on the graves of the old husbandmen, who have driven their horses or their oxen so many times over the neighboring roads, so many times have harrowed or sown the bare fields scattered round about, and who, after a life of labor and

“long usage,” taste, in the field of the parochial cemetery, the peasant’s last rest,—death.





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